

NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 3, No. 1

January 1963

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SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SUBSCRIBERS
TO THE NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS HELD AT THE
RESIDENCE OF MR. ZAFAR FUTEHALLY AT 4 P.M. ON
SUNDAY, 23 DECEMBER 1962

Minutes

The following were present:

Dr. Salim Ali	Mr. William Selover
Dr. B. Biswas	Mr. & Mrs. Zafar Futehally
K.S. Lavkumar	Major W.V. Soman
Mr. & Mrs. V. Neelakant	Mr. V.C. Ambedkar
Mr. J.S. Serrao	Mr. V.K. Chari
Mr. P.W. Soman	Mr. Hasan Tyabji
Mr. J.C. Daniel	Mr. J.A. Gaitonde
Mr. N. T. Nadkarny	

Dr. Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the meeting.

Letters from Yuvrajshri Shivrajkumar, Mrs. Usha Ganguli, Capt. N. S. Tyabji, Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, and Joseph George in connection with this meeting were read out.

Mr. Zafar Futehally reported that about Rs750/- have been collected by way of subscription so far. This amount will be handed over to the new Committee for 1963 as expenses so far would be absorbed by Messrs Garlick & Co. Private Ltd. who did the cyclostyling of

of the Newsletter free of charge, and Messrs Dynacraft Machine Co. Private Ltd. who bore the expenses of postage and stationery.

A proposal by Mr. P.D. Stracey that the Newsletter should reserve space in the Cheetal magazine rather than be in the form of an independent publication was considered. However, it was thought that independent existence of the Newsletter was desirable as it was helping to create a lot of interest in birds.

It was suggested that the Editorial Board should be reconstituted in such a way that there was only one editor in each region, as it was felt that divided responsibility occasionally created confusion. It was decided that the Editorial Board for 1963 should consist of:

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| (1) Dr. Salim Ali, Bombay | (2) Dr. R.M. Naik. Baroda |
| (3) Dr. B.Biswas, Calcutta | (4) Mrs. Jamal Ala, Bihar |
| (5) Mrs. Usha Ganguli, Delhi | (6) Mr. E.D. Avari, Darjeeling |
| (7) Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, Trichur | (8) Kumar Shri Lavkumar, Saurashtra |
| (9) Zafar Futchally, Editor | |

Dr. Salim Ali recommended that the BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA should be constituted with the object of doing field work and studying the life-histories of the birds of the country. This work was of the highest importance, and apart from contributing material for the Newsletter the various regional editors should also act as regional secretaries of this club. Dr. Salim Ali would be sending out a circular to guide the regional editors detailing the type of work which should be done.

The Newsletter would become the organ of the BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA. The membership of the Club of Rs5/- per year would entitle members to get the Newsletter free of cost.

This proposal was unanimously adopted and K.S. Lavkumar undertook the responsibility of drawing up the constitution of the Club by the end of January 1963. Mr. William Selover also agreed to help K.S. Lavkumar in drawing up the constitution.

The desirability of holding the Annual Birdwatchers' Competition was discussed. It was felt that the competition should be held on regional lines, and regional editors-cum-secretaries should decide about this taking local conditions into account.

Dr. Salim Ali in winding up the proceedings congratulated all members of the Editorial Board on the good work they have done. He also thanked Messrs Garlick & Co. Prvt. Ltd., and Messrs. Dynacraft Machine Co. Prvt. Ltd. for helping the Newsletter in its initial stages.

The meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

HOUBARA OR MACQUEEN'S BUSTARD IN SUFFOLK, ENGLAND

Readers in India may be interested to know that considerable excitement has been aroused in ornithological circles here by the appearance in Suffolk, four or five miles inland from Dunwich, of a Houbara or Macqueen's Bustard (Chlamydotis undulata macqueeni).

This is only the fifth time that the bird has ever been recorded in the British Isles. All four previous visits were also to the eastern part of the country and each occurred in October. The last was in 1898.

My friends and I first saw the bird on 6th December, but I gather that it had been seen and identified about a fortnight previously.

It was not shy and wary, as bustards are reported to be, and could be easily approached to within about 125 yards. The bird spent most of its time in a mustard field, from which it was reluctant to be driven and to which it would return as soon as it felt it could with safety.

Excellent views were obtained of the bird both on the ground and on the wing.

The nearest areas to India in which the Houbara breeds are Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the Mekran Coast. To India it is a winter visitor, generally arriving at the beginning of October and leaving at the end of March or early in April. It is to be found in the dry, sandy, semi-desert parts of the Punjab, Rajasthan, Sind, Kutch, Saurashtra, and northern Gujarat, and, apart from stragglers, does not occur south and east of a line from Delhi to Baroda.

The Houbara is beautifully illustrated and authoritatively dealt with in GAME BIRDS OF INDIA, BURMA AND CEYLON, by R.C. Stuart Baker, vol. II, p. 186.

S.K. REEVES

57, West Hill Ave., Epsom, Surrey

A photograph of a Houbara by Eric Hosking, presumably of the same individual, is published in the Sunday edition of the London Times (16.xii.1962) under the caption 'First Visit of the Century'. - Ed.7

THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

It was very interesting to read the information regarding the Great Indian Bustard in western Rajasthan in the October issue of the Newsletter. It is heartening to learn from this source that the Bustard is still quite plentiful in the desert tracts of the State. However, such publicizing of the bird's status and the locality where they still are seen in some numbers is dangerous for the bird itself, as poachers are bound to take advantage of this information. The suggestion mooted of establishing a large sanctuary with pinioned birds ranging over the area is worth consideration, with certain reservations of course.

The best method to safeguard the Great Indian Bustard is to include it on the list of the "farmers' friends". Specially in Rajasthan, where locust-fighting is a major project, the introduction of the bird to farmers and herdsmen should be made so as to make them aware of the value of the bird as a destroyer of locusts and other such pests. An effort in this way to elicit positively their help in protecting the bustard would go further than all the legislation banning its shooting. Once the villagers realise the bird's value to their economy, they will no doubt extend it protection from poachers in the same way as sentiment has safe-guarded so large and possibly such a good eating bird like the Sarus Crane and the peafowl. I am certain that it is mainly indiscriminate killing which has sadly reduced the numbers of the Great Indian Bustard. The spread of agriculture is not the main cause, as they could no doubt range across cultivated land for their omnivorous fare. During the rains when they breed, there is sufficient shelter for them in the crops. Bustards wherever they are not harried by man, are remarkably tolerant of his proximity.

There is little purpose served by establishing sanctuaries without proper staff to protect the inmates, and Dr. Salim Ali is right in claiming that the interests of the bustard are little served by publicity about its status and present range, and surveys carried out by all and sundry to determine the species localization only helps to expose the surviving elements to persecution and final extermination. Publishing the status of the Great Indian Bustard even in this Newsletter will undoubtedly have its adverse repercussions. Information has got to be gathered, I agree, but all well wishers of the Bustard should work without publicity.

Bustards are omnivorous and this makes me confidently suggest that chicks just hatched can be reared in better managed zoos, or by qualified individuals, and when matured, they most certainly would breed in captivity. The Great European Bustard has been successfully kept in captivity, but as yet bustards have not been bred under captivity to my knowledge. However, any such experimentation at handrearing bustard chicks should be done only on authorization by the Wild Life Preservation Board, as to experiment and kill the chicks in the process is, I expect, as much an offence as to shoot an adult bird.

Finally may I again caution those members who are fortunate enough to be living in areas where the Great Indian Bustard is still to be found to keep their knowledge of the bird in the area strictly to themselves, and to only pass on their information to the Editor of the Newsletter, who could then accumulate a dossier on the species for possibly working out a method of preserving it from extinction.

K.S. Lavkumar

CUCKOOS IN BIHAR

Of the cuckoos the papiha and the koel thrust themselves on one's attention by their repeated calls. The easiest way to identify the cuckoos is by their calls.

The European Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus), found in Monghyr, Hazaribagh and Ranchi calls Cook-koo; near the female in display cook-cook-cook-koo. According to Stuart Baker, Blanford and others found it in Chotanagpur during April, May, and June. I found a pair in display at Kalimati, 16 miles from Ranchi on the Chaibassa Road during the month of July. Undoubtedly it breeds there.

The Himalayan Cuckoo (Cuculus saturatus), reported from Bihar by Stuart Baker as a winter visitor, but seen by none after that. Its call is: hook.....po-po-po, similar to the Hoopoe's.

The Indian Cuckoo (Cuculus micropterus), found in all forest areas of Bihar, has a call which is variously rendered by different people as: orange-pelee, crossword-puzzle, utho-dekho, koi-dekho-to, and ham-sota-tota.

Papiha or Common Hawk-Cuckoo (Cuculus varius), found all over the State calls: pee-pee-ha or pikahan or pa-pee-ha or kaiphal-pucca. Large Hawk-Cuckoo (Cuculus parveroides) found in Hazaribagh, calls like the Papiha but the call is less shrill.

The Plaintive Cuckoo (Cuculus merulinus) found in Hazaribagh has a call: pee-peak followed by tay-ta-tay. It is also rendered as yeh-chalte-rahi.

The Drongo Cuckoo (Surnia lugubris), found in Monghyr, Hazaribagh, and Singhbhum, has a human whistle of six notes and a plaintive note weg-ahin (Stuart Baker). Five or six whistling notes on an ascending scale (Smythies).

The Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) found all over the State has a wild metallic whistle note piu-piu-pee-pee-piu-pee-pee-piu and a number of unpleasant screams.

The Redwinged Crested Cuckoo (Clamator coromandus) has been reported from Chotanagpur by Stuart Baker but I have not come across it. Inglis reports it from Anarh in Darbhanga district. It has a loud harsh screech and a hoarse whistle, according to Smythies.

The Koel (Eudynamys scolopacea) found all over the State, calls coo-oo, ku-hu-ku-hu. It can also be rendered you're ill, you're ill, etc. Mimics the Golden Oriole.

The Malkoha (Taccocua trisilis) found in Ranchi, Singhbhum and Manbhum has a soft chuckling note, a low cook cook cook, sometimes ending with a run co-co-co-co-co (Smythies).

The Sirkeer (Taccocua leschenaulti) found all over Monghyr, Santhal, Parganas, Palamau, Singhbhum and Manbhum has a soft chuckling note khokh-bha.

The Crow-Pheasant (Centropus sinensis) found all over the State calls hud, hud, hud or coop-coop-coop.

All the cuckoos are arboreal except the Sirkeer and the Crow-Pheasant. The Sirkeer, Crow-Pheasant, and the Malkoha are the only members of the tribe that do not foist their eggs for hatching on other birds.

The Sirkeer is slightly smaller than the Crow-Pheasant but so different that it cannot be confused with it. The sirkeer is an earthy-brown bird with shiny shafts of black all over it. The short and curved bill is cherry-red; the eyes are crimson and the outer tail feathers are tipped white.

The large-green-billed malkoha has a long tail, and measures in all up to 23 inches, that means it is considerably larger than the tree-pie and the large racket-tailed drongo. The four white double-spots down its tail and the wide red patch around its eyes are excellent distinguishing marks. The bird is fond of dense forest and therefore appears very dark except for the white tips to the tail-feathers. It is partial to water and therefore is to be seen at the Topchanchi and Dimna nullah reservoirs in Manbhum and Singhbhum respectively. It also occurs on the Paras-nath Hill in Hazaribagh and along the Deo River at Patung in the Kolhan Forest Division, Singhbhum District.

(Mrs.) Jamai Ara

DEMOISELLE CRANES AS INDICATORS OF WEATHER

It is a well-known fact that the Common and Demoiselle Cranes are migratory birds and visit our country in the winter months:

I have always been interested in these birds first as a shikari and then as a birdwatcher. One thing very remarkable about these birds is that they start arriving in North India after the monsoon in late September or early October. But sometimes one or two smaller flocks may arrive before the last rainfall. But once 3, 4 or more flocks arrive the prediction of end of the monsoon can safely be made. The arrivals and a few events at Lucknow are given below.

Year	Arrival date and numbers	Weather
1950	Sept. 29 - 1st flock	No rain after 19 Sept.
	Oct. 3 - 3 flocks	Heavy clouds on 30
	Oct. 7 - 2 flocks, and so on	Sept. Weather dry throughout
1952	Oct. 1 - 2 flocks	Last rain 22 Sept.
	Oct. 3 - 1 flock	Fair weather
	Oct. 4 - 2 flocks	throughout
	Oct. 5 - 2 flocks, and so on	
1955	Sept. 27 - 1st flock	Last reported rain -fall Sept. 10
	Oct. 12 - 3 flocks	Heavy rains on 29 and 30th Sept.
	Oct. 14 - 6 flocks	
1958	Sept. 30 - 3 flocks	Last rain Sept. 23
	Oct. 1 - 2 flocks	Fair weather
	Oct. 4 - 4 flocks	
	Oct. 6 - 1 flock	
1959	Sept. 27 - 2 flocks	Last reported rain
	Sept. 29 - 1 flock	Sept. 19
	Oct. 3 - 1 flock	
	Oct. 4 - 1 flock	Fair weather
	Oct. 6 - 3 flocks	
1960	Sept. 24 - 1 flock	Last rain Sept. 15
	Sept. 25 - 2 flocks	Very heavy rains on 8th and 9th Oct.
	Oct. 19 - 6 flocks	It rained about 11 in., and in the neighbouring districts it rained as much as 16 in. in 24 hrs.
	Oct. 22 - 3 flocks	
1961	Sept. 26 - 1 flock	Last rain Sept. 18
	Oct. 11 - 5 flocks	Heavy rains on Oct. 3 and 4.
1962	Sept. 20 - 3 flocks	Last rain Sept. 13
	Sept. 24 - 4 flocks	
	Sept. 25 - 5 flocks	

I hope this will be of interest to the readers of the Newsletter.

Naresh Singh
Wild Life Warden, Forest Dept., U.P., Lucknow

HOW BIRDS ARE NAMED AND CLASSIFIED (Concluded)

Nomenclature

Nomenclature means a system of names (Latin nomen:name, calare: to call). It is the naming of organisms. All scientific names must be words which are either Latin or Latinized, or are treated as such in case they are not of classic origin.

The scientific name of the Paradise Flycatcher is Terpsiphone paradisi (scientific names are always printed in italics). The first word 'Terpsiphone' denotes the generic name and the second 'paradisi' the specific trivial name. The specific trivial name is a qualifying of the genus. The generic name always begins with capital initial letter and the specific trivial name with small initial letter. Since the scientific name has always two words, this system of naming is known as binomial nomenclature. The system of binomial nomenclature for animals came into existence with the tenth edition of Linnaeus's SYSTEMA NATURAE (effectively from 1 January 1758). Linnaeus who has been rightly called as the father of Taxonomy, knew only 564 species of birds; the number of species of birds known at present is 8600.

To denote the subspecies within a polytypic species a third name is attached to the specific name. Thus the scientific name of a subspecies consists of three words denoting the genus, species, and subspecies respectively. Since it has three words, this method of naming is called trinomial nomenclature.

The man who first describes a bird can choose what specific and/or subspecific name he likes. Usually names chosen refer to a peculiarity of the bird's appearance (Jungle Crow, Corvus macro-rhynchos, macro: large, rhynchos: beak), where it lives (Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Vanellus malabaricus - denotes the place, Mala-bar in Kerala), or the original describer names it in honour of a friend or specialist in the same group (White-eye, Zosterops palpebrosa salimalii).

The scientific name is usually followed by the author's name. When the author originally described the species as a member of the genus in which it is now placed, his name is written without parenthesis. On the contrary, if the author placed the species in another genus than the one followed now, his name is written within parenthesis. To cite an example the Black-and-orange Flycatcher Saxicola nigrorufa was first described by Jerdon. He kept the species in the genus Saxicola. Now the species is kept under the genus Muscicapa. So his name is written within parenthesis, thus Muscicapa nigrorufa (Jerdon).

Binomial and trinomial nomenclature as the case may be, is an internationally accepted system. In all scientific works these scientific names are used, which as is put by Dr. Salim Ali 'enables the reader of one nation to understand what the writer of another nation is talking about'.

Taxonomy is most advanced in birds than in any other animals. The amateur will always play a most important role in collecting much of the raw materials with which taxonomist work. New systematics is the sum total of the sound and intelligent conclusions derived from other biological pursuits such as physiology, ecology, ethology, population genetics, zoo-geography, etc. Professional taxonomists hardly get any time after their routine work in the laboratory to work in the field. The amateur who possesses an observant eye and an understanding heart can provide a lot of

valuable information from field, especially on breeding activities, behavioural patterns, habitat, etc., which we need very badly about our birds.

During the rule of foreigners they used to collect bird skins and send them to foreign museums. There museum men giving more stress on the external resemblances classified them. Whether this arrangement made mainly on external characters is a natural one or not is to be tested by well-planned field work.

The most recent phase in taxonomy is the study of speciation: How species originate?

P.V. George, M.Sc.
Research Training Scholar, Bird Section,
Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta

BIRD WATCHING IN THE UNITED STATES

Probably the most popular type of bird study in the United States is bird watching, or just plain birding. For the beginner, field identification of a few local birds may be the aim. For others, the desire is for compiling as large a list as possible during a day, a year, or possibly a lifetime.

It is generally agreed that the late Ludlow Griscom, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, holds the record of having seen the most birds during a lifetime. His world life list is well over 3000 species identified in the field.

In a single year, observers who live close to salt water will compile local lists of 300 or more species. In the more inland states, a little over 200 birds is a good year's total. For a time, the largest one year's list for North America was 572 species, made by Roger T. Peterson. More recently, Stuart Keith piled up a grand total of 594 species to set a new record.

Perhaps the two most highly organized bird watching events of the year are the Christmas and May-day counts. In each case, individuals or groups of birdwatchers attempt to compile as large a list of birds as possible within a single day. The Christmas count is held on any day during the Christmas week; whereas, the May-day tournament is usually held in mid-May.

The Christmas count, initiated by Frank M. Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History in 1900, has increased in popularity and magnitude ever since. On the first count 27 people at 25 stations participated, but in 1960 close to 10,000 people at 594 stations in 49 states, Canada, and the District of Columbia, listed 501 species of birds. Charles Rogers of Princeton University has not missed a Christmas count since the idea started back in 1900.

Although originally intended as a winter bird census, the Christmas count has developed more and more into a competitive game between groups of bird listers. To gain larger lists, observers often separate into several smaller groups and pool their lists at the end of the day. However, they must stay within a circle fifteen miles in diameter. There is much plotting done on maps in order to place the circle in such a way, as to include some of the best bird places in the area.

All of the birds seen are jotted down in a notebook or on a check list and notes on weather, temperature, wind velocity, and habitats are also included. The number of each species of bird is recorded,

unless the flocks are so large that only an estimate can be made. If a rare bird is seen, all of the substantiating evidence must be given. Results from the counts are later compiled and sent to the National Audubon Society for publication in Audubon Field Notes.

Frequently 100 or more birds are recorded during the Christmas count, but the largest number of birds recorded seems to be 196 at Cocoa, Florida, in 1960.

The second of the two big yearly events is the May-day count. Although generally similar to the Christmas count, the rules are somewhat different. For this event, the object is to compile a list of as many as possible in a day, although 100 species is usually the aim. Often, the count is made locally, but there is no restriction as to the area covered. Observers frequently make plans weeks in advance. Each hour of the day is mapped out so that the most productive places are visited at the best time. Birding goes on from dark to dark and the observers attempt to search out every last bird in the area. Many times a limit of four people to each car is set, in order to place each observer next to a door. In this way, a minimum of time is spent getting in and out of the cars to record roadside species. There is no limit as to the size of the groups participating and frequently the larger the group the larger the list will be. Sometimes there is a considerable rivalry among competing observers in their efforts to secure the longest list. At the end of the day, the individuals that have not dropped out from physical exhaustion compile their list. For those with 100 or more birds there is the satisfaction and pleasure of a days job well done, but for the disappointed and tired observer with less than 100 species, the only comfort is that maybe next year will be much better.

Among the most famous May-day trips were those organized by the late Charles Urner in New Jersey. Urner's lists usually exceeded 150 species of birds, and once was as high as 173 for a single day.

A variation of the May-day count is the 'Roundup'. For this type of count there are no restrictions on distance or number of groups, providing they all start from the same point. All the lists are combined at the end of the day. By 'pooling' lists in this manner, observers from the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club checked off a record 232 birds in a single day in 1960. For this record a total of 55 observers in 13 groups took part. As a result, hardly any one individual even approached seeing this many birds.

Truly, birdwatching of this type cannot be considered very scientific, but some information on migration, bird invasions, distribution, extension of range, and periodic increases and declines of birds has been gained from these counts. To most of us, however, this sort of thing is a game; not one to be engaged in every week end, but a type of recreation that can be very enjoyable once or twice a year.

Richard F. Bernard
George J. Wallace

14 June 1962

: 10 :

BIRDS IN THE SUN. Text by Malcolm Macdonald. Photographs by Christina Loke. pp. 128. H.F. and G. Witherby Ltd. Price 48s.

It is possible that this gorgeous volume ought to be classified as an art book rather than a bird book. Christina Loke's photographs have already been published as illustrations to Malcolm Macdonald's BIRDS IN MY DELHI GARDEN. But this is her first collection of colour photographs; and some of the most successful pictures can stand comparison with the work of Eric Hosking, from whom, indeed, she acknowledges that she has received a great deal of advice and help.

Of the 42 full page photographs some have the qualities of well-posed portraits, others are action pictures which bear testimony to the incredible quickness of eye possessed by the photographer. Whichever it is, each picture can be judged as an integrated piece of art as well as a documentation of nature. The copper-coloured background of the picture of the Short-toed Eagle, for instance, gives it the quality of a Japanese painting. Black seems to be a difficult colour to reproduce well. The pictures of the Pied Kingfisher, the Crow-Pheasant, and Indian Robin lose something because the black parts appear a pale blue-grey.

In the first chapter Mr. Malcolm Macdonald introduces and eulogizes the photographer. Christina Loke's own short preface gives an idea of the amount of pluck, determination and resource which, apart from mere skill, is the price for securing every exposure. The body of the text generally consists of the descriptions of each photograph and the circumstances in which it was taken, rather than of the bird itself. To that extent it seems orientated towards aspiring photographers rather than 'pure' ornithologists.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The formation of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India (see minutes of the meeting) will not necessarily result in increased bird study in this country. Quite a few of the well-known natural history clubs in India are languishing for want of support from its members, and it can only be hoped that readers of our Newsletter will put in the sustained effort that is required to make this new club a success.

One suggestion put forward at the meeting was that during 1963 all readers should do intensive work on the House Sparrow. There are gaps in the knowledge of the life-history of this bird which can be quickly bridged by careful observation by birdwatchers in the country. Dr. Salim Ali has agreed to guide persons in this work, and an initial contribution will be given in one of the future issues of the Newsletter. Systematic note taking in the field is of crucial importance, and it is important to carry a note book and pencil about always. One never knows what will turn up round the corner.

JORGES PONDENCE

BIRDS AND LOCUSTS

On the 27th July, while we were having cricket practice, there came along a huge swarm of locusts. Doubtlessly you must have heard about it in the papers.

The swarm kept on passing us for about an hour or so, and occasionally limited our vision.

Following the horde which was in some respects like that of the Yellow Mongols there came a few birds. Among the birds of prey were the Pariah Kites. The kites used to follow the locusts from behind and tried to catch them with their beaks. One could almost hear the snap of their beaks as they gripped the hoppers.

When the kites failed to take them in this manner they tried a different strategy, and flew against the in-coming cloud. This was more successful. The crows too had a wonderful time. They caught the locusts from behind just as they catch small bats at dusk. Unlike the crows the pigeons and the Scavenger Vultures were having a difficult work on hand. The Scavengers flew above the cloud of insects and the pigeons had to accelerate very fast at times to break through the opening in the cloud.

The farmers of Rohtak in Delhi might be having a tough time, but the feathered friends seem to be quite happy. Even as I write this (27 July 1962) the locusts are passing by.

Anwar Khan of Sultanabad-

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DUSKY CRAG-MARTIN (*Riparia concolor* Sykes) HAWKING FEATHERS

The note by Mr. Vaid and Joseph George in the Newsletter No. 11 of November 1962, about collection of nest material by swifts reminds me of pigeon cages of our neighbour who had as many as 50 pairs - some very good fliers.

We often joined in a party and enjoyed the fun of flying the pigeons higher and higher until suddenly a hawk or a falcon or a merlin would swoop on them and then all of us would shout very loudly to frighten the raptor and try to save our birds from his talons; most of the time we were successful in this.

The youngsters who were not allowed to join in our fun enjoyed a different game. They collected small feathers of birds and stood with these between two fingers before a wall. They blew at the feather along the wall. They would try to blow it higher and higher or clap their hands to displace some air below it. In doing this many times they had to collect the fallen feather and blow it again. With the wind in their favour the 'birds' - the boys called them with different pet names, viz. makwa, lili, kalia, etc. would rise up and up sometimes to appreciable heights. A Dusky Crag-Martin which used to have a mud nest below the parapet of our house would suddenly swoop on the air-borne feather and carry it away to its nest.

I am sure that the Dusky Crag-Martin collects its nest materials from the ground also, unlike the swifts mentioned by Vaid and Joseph George.

P. W. Soman

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THE NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

I am very impressed by the Newsletter which I have long felt was essential to bring together all of us interested in birds in this vast country where there is so much field work to be done.

Peter F.R. Jackson
Reuters, New Delhi 11

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'SEA SANCTUARY'

On 29th August, we saw, in the school, a most fascinating nature picture 'Sea Sanctuary' by the courtesy of the British Information Services. The rocky and forbidding rock of Langton lighthouse ('Though three men dwell on Flannan Isle') is visited by spring, and flock after flock arrive for the breeding season, Guillemot, Shag, Penguin, Puffin, Gull and the Arctic Tern. Stakes are made for nesting sites, in hollows, on precarious ledge. The keening of the birds and their sudden wheeling over turned something over inside you. The chick appeared and were fed with fish. An erring fledgeling had little chance of survival, for the Terns (which make such a lovely silhouette in flight) demonstrated 'nature red in tooth and claw'.

Reproduced from Shri Shivaji Preparatory Military School's Samachar, No. 85, 20th September, 1962

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'OUR FEATHERED ENEMIES'

I want to draw your attention towards an article published in the Life magazine of U.S.A. of 30 July 1962. The heading of the article is 'Our Feathered Enemies'. In this article it is said that many birds are very dangerous for human beings. They spread many deadly virus diseases. The article stresses that pigeons are one of the most dangerous of birds because they take prominent part in spreading the dangerous virus diseases.

I want to know for the safety of all concerned how far it is true. I hope you will throw some light over this problem in your Newsletter.

Kameshwar Pal Singh,
Dist. Patna

We will be commenting on this subject in a future issue. - Ed.7

Zafar Futchally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1953 February

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COOPERATIVE FIELD STUDIES OF BIRDS

At the annual meeting of readers of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers in December (1962) a suggestion was made by Mr. Zafar Futehally that during the current year we should try and conduct a cooperative study on some one particular bird species. The House Sparrow was named, and I was asked to prepare a sort of questionnaire for the guidance of participants in the scheme. Below are a few simple topics on which collective observations over the entire year would prove worth while. Since there is so little exact data available, almost anything based on methodical observation would be of value. The data will naturally vary with season and conditions prevailing in the different parts of the country, but all this should add to the comprehensiveness of the investigation.

Apart from observations on the local sparrow population in general, two or three particular pairs of birds should be selected for detailed nesting and behaviour study. It will be essential to mark the birds either by daubing parts of the plumage with distinctive dyes -- blue, red, green, etc. -- or ringing them with coloured rings so that the individuals may be recognized with absolute certainty.

When do the birds commence nesting?

By which sex is the nest-site selected?

Is the selection made before or after pair formation?

How does pair formation take place?

Is there rivalry among different birds for the nest-sites and/or for mates?

Is the number of males and females (sex ratio) equal, or are there more birds of one sex?

Does each male have only one female, or several as in the closely related Baya Weaver Bird? In other words, is there any evidence of polygyny or polyandry?

How many broods does the House Sparrow raise in a year? Does it breed continuously, or is there a definite season?

Does the pair remain constant, or does the partnership change for each brood?

Is the same nest, or nest-site, used for successive broods and in successive years?

Is it used by the same occupants, or by any one of the pair, or by a totally different pair?

Does the House Sparrow ever nest in trees?

If so, under what conditions, and what sort of nest does it build in a tree?

How is the labour of nest building shared between the sexes?

Are there any particular spots in your neighbourhood where House Sparrows are more abundant than in other spots? What are the factors that bring about this patchiness in local distribution?

Are there any favourite trees or thorn thickets in which House Sparrows roost at night?

Are these roosts used throughout the year, or only at certain seasons?

Do both sexes share a common roost, or do males and females occupy separate roosts?

Do the same occupants return to the same roost each night, or are the birds unattached to any roost?

Is the same branch or place occupied by the same individual night after night?

How far around the roost do the birds disperse to forage during daytime? (This can be studied by spraying huddled birds at the roost at night with indelible dyes -- say red at one roost, blue at another and so on -- and observing their daily rhythm.)

Do birds from the same roost show any tendency to communal segregation during daytime, or do they freely intermix with members of other roosts?

What is the House Sparrow's clutch size, i.e. total number of eggs laid in a nest, in your region? (Average of at least 10 clutches desirable.)

What is the interval between the laying of each egg?

What is the incubation period and role of the sexes in incubation? (This can be determined by marking the date on each egg as it is laid, to be quite certain when it hatches.)

What is the share of the sexes in nest feeding? (Number of visits by male and female with food for the nestlings per hour at different stages of rearing. Determine nature of food brought, if possible.)

What is the mortality of young in nest, and at the flying stage? Chief causes? (Growth rates of nestlings can be studied by daubing them with different dyes and weighing them daily at a fixed time.)

What is the mortality among adults? Chief causes?

What are the House Sparrow's companions, competitors, and enemies?

What specific advantages does the bird derive in your region by living in association with man?

These are only a few of the innumerable points which members could study, wherever they are. A cooperative investigation of this sort can furnish information of very great value and interest. However, instead of taking on too much all at once, it might be better to restrict the effort to just one or two topics for the start, say Nesting (which could include a number of sub-headings), and/or Roosting. This does not, of course, mean that observers should shut their eyes to everything else! Moreover, while the House Sparrow has been suggested for convenience, as a bird likely to be found wherever members live in India, often no doubt even sharing their flat or bungalow, it may be that in some remote 'uncivilized' place, or in a settlement only recently established, the bird may as yet be absent. There is every chance that the Sparrow will arrive there before long, but in the meanwhile it is not recommended that members should sit with folded hands awaiting its advent. They should select and start off on the commonest and most convenient-to-study bird of their region. It may be possible to find other persons similarly placed elsewhere, to start a parallel cooperative study of their own.

Sálim Ali

A TRIP TO TUKERWARA LAKE IN RAJASTHAN

This lake is about 45 miles from Ajmer on the way to Chitor. It is a big lake with a small island in the middle. This island which is about one furlong in length is the breeding ground of about 500 Painted Storks. The island appeared to remain undisturbed by men and beasts throughout their breeding season.

I, along with Mr. Gibson, went to this island in a small canvas boat for different purposes. In the beginning the birds were very much disturbed and the sky was full with flying storks. The place was full of babool trees and all of these irrespective of their size were full of nests of different sizes. Many nests could be reached standing on the ground. Most of the nests were with young storks ranging from a week old chick to a near-grown-up who could not fly. Although they are supposed to lay more than 3 eggs, I did not see any nest with more than two young. I collected addled eggs from two nests on the same tree, three eggs from each nest. To my dismay I discovered the skeletons of a pair of storks under the tree - may be of the parents of these unhatched eggs.

The near-grown-ups were disturbed at my approach near their nests and on two occasions I observed them disgorging their meal of fish containing barbs and snakeheads, and climbed to a nest higher than their own. However, they were never so scared as to try to fly or trample young ones on their way up.

Parent storks came and settled at safe distances from their nests. It was quite a fun to watch them looking at me suspiciously through the corner of their eyes.

Nests of cormorants and little egrets were also seen among the stork nests. Young ones of these birds were also observed.

I was intrigued to see a pair of Whitebreasted Munias under one of the nests. After a little observation I found out that they were sub-tenants in one of the stork's nest; with a few straws here and there they had built a comfortable home for themselves and their future ones without much trouble. I saw later another nest of munias in the same circumstances.

Another interesting fact I noticed was, that crows, kites, and buzzards which flew past nests with young chicks in it, never stooped to pick up young ones. Normally, they would never miss a chance like that.

On the other side of the lake about 200 pelicans and 500 flamingos could be seen. They flew in a big formation on hearing the firing of guns at ducks and geese.

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OCCURRENCE OF THE PAINTED PARTRIDGE, FRANCOLINUS PICTUS, IN RAJASTHAN

Stuart Baker (1898, FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds 4:137-138), and Salim Ali (1961, THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS:81) mention that the range of the Painted Partridge, Francolinus pictus Jardine & Selby, is south of the range of the Black Partridge, F. francolinus, which is distributed in the Peninsula but is wanting on the Malabar coast, south of Bombay. Stuart Baker records its northern boundary in Gujarat.

Recently, Painted Partridge were collected from Pushkar (Ajmer), Pali, Rani, Bisalpur, and Bhitwara (Pali-Erinpura road). They were observed singly and in pairs in grasslands below hillocks near water canals. They were usually found under Zizyphus nummularia, Prosopis juliflora, and Prosopis spicigera bushes.

Since Painted Partridge were always observed along water canals, it appears that this species entered Rajasthan through water canals from southern boundaries, touching Gujarat. As more irrigation canals are coming up in these parts of Rajasthan, it is felt that the range of this species will extend further.

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NESTING ACTIVITIES OF THE BAYBACKED SHRIKE :
OBSERVATIONS MADE IN THE LODI GARDENS, NEW
DELHI

In a note on 'Bird Nesting in the Lodi Gardens, Delhi', Vol. 2(8), I had indicated certain survival figures of nests species-wise against total numbers observed. This note deals with my observations on the Baybacked Shrike, Lanius vittatus, from the time of pairing to hatching, and just after.

Unfortunately, out of the five nests observed, three were destroyed immediately after the eggs were laid, and I only discovered the other two just a couple of days before leaving Delhi for a month. There had been other breaks in my observations as well, and, therefore, all that I am going to attempt here is to provide a composite picture of the general pattern of pairing and nesting activities of this species, as it emerges from my notes on observations in the Lodi Gardens.

31.1.1962. Time: 1430. Bright sun but cool

Two birds seen in company for the first time this year, first on a neem and then on a babool. Obviously paired, since they kept together for the whole period of observation - 1½ hours. They kept themselves occupied with their normal feeding sallies to the ground but remained in company throughout.

7.3.1962. Time: 0700. Chilly with the sun just coming up

Pair seen together about 40 ft. up on an eucalyptus (most uncommon as these birds normally prefer lower branches of small trees and are seldom seen perched higher than 20 ft. from ground). One of the birds, presumably the male, was singing loudly but most pleasantly, including in its song a number of other bird-calls. Its companion was altogether silent during this performance. The male bird, however, seemed greatly excited and kept turning towards its companion in jerky movements as it poured out its heart in ecstatic song. The birds kept following each other from branch to branch (in no particular order) and eventually took to wing together and were lost to view. Total period of observation about 20 minutes.

10.3.1962. Time: 0730 (approx.)

Single birds seen on the higher branches of trees (mostly at the top) singing loudly and delightfully with other bird-calls woven into the song. Could this be an invitation?

16.3.1962. Time: 0735 (approx.)

Pair seen collecting nesting material -- long strands stripped off green vine stems. Both birds made two sorties each within a period of about 15 minutes to the same vine. The bird would perch on the stem, neatly prize up a thin strip from as far up as possible and thereafter opening up about 6 inches to 8 inches take to wing pulling out a strip from 18 in. to 24 inches long.

On the second visit a Tree Pie (Dendrocitta vagabunda) was noticed perched on a near-by neem, and was subjected to a lightening attack by both shrikes. The Tree Pie happened to be just above me and I heard distinct sounds of pecking as the birds attacked on the first run. However, this did not seem to worry the Tree Pie much, and he only took to wing, with some show of dignity, as the Shrikes came in for the second attack. It was chased for a short distance after which the Shrikes returned to the vine for some more building

Is it possible that the attack on the Tree Pie may have been due to the instinctive need to prevent disclosure of the nest site?

15.4.1962. Time: 0800 (approx.)

First completed nest observed in a horizontal fork of one of the lower branches of an apricot tree about 7 ft. from ground.

Nest typical of the species made of soft grasses, cobwebs, etc. It was discovered by chance as birds were observed to enter thick overhanging foliage, so contrary to their normal habits. The bird left the tree soon after, and I spotted the nest immediately I walked under the tree -- it was untended at the time. About fifteen minutes later, I observed a bird sitting in the nest but it left soon after. Though the nest was well hidden from outside it could be easily spotted as soon as you went under the canopy, the tree itself being in the midst of open and well-frequented lawns. The nest was found destroyed a few days later.

On the morning of 11 May 1962, just two days before we were to leave Delhi again, I discovered a nest sited in a babool about 6½ ft. above ground and the tree itself just 3 ft. away from the edge of a well-frequented road within the park. I kept a watch on this nest from 1415-1615 on 11th May, and 0714-0805 on 12th May. During this period of observation all the feed was picked up from within a well-defined area whose boundaries seemed to be determined by certain trees. The following sketch will give an idea of the actual area. I am not using the term 'territory', as the periods of observation would hardly justify a categorical assumption in this regard.

I now reproduce my notes in full.

11.5.1962.

0720: Female bird seen in nest. Male first seen near nest and then fetching food for mate 2 or 3 times. Once, when female left nest for about 5 minutes male at once appeared near the nest but seemed uncertain and flew off in same direction as female. After a short time both birds returned to nest together, and whilst the female moved in over the eggs, he remained nearby for a while and left.

At this time about 0730, I am certain the eggs had not hatched as there was no activity in the nest, and male bird only brought feed for his mate.

I visited the nest again that afternoon and the next morning and give below a chronological account of the behaviour of the parent birds as observed.

1415: Bird seen sitting in nest (presumably female).

1430: Male arrived at nest with worm which it transferred to female who got up very deliberately from the nest to take it.

Note: Nest about 4 inches deep and 4 inches across made of grassy strands, plastered externally with cobwebs and lined with piece of cloth. Bird's rump and tail overhang nest, bird seen to stand up every few minutes but crouch down again as soon as she heard sounds of approaching feet on the road 3 ft. away.

1445: Male arrived at nest with a winged insect. He was at the nest for a few seconds before female took insect from his bill, and left nest with it. Male remained at edge of nest for about ½ minute and left.

1450: Male returned to nest (without food) and remained on the edge.

1454: Male left; female returned to nest and kept standing in nest till 1458.

1458: Male returned with insect, transferred to female and left.
1507: Male with food; female stood up in nest and took insect.
1510: Male with food, transferred to female.
1515: Male with food; female got up and swallowed faecal sac.
After this female kept standing with spread wings to protect young from direct sun. It seemed young had recently been hatched. No feeding of young observed.

1520: Male with food; transferred to female who fed young for first time.

1525: Female left as male arrived, hovered over nest and left.

1527: Male arrived at untended nest and fed young.

1530: Male at nest again with food for young.

1535: Female returned to nest without food.

1535: Male arrived with food, transferred to female who fed one young; the worm was swallowed after considerable travail.

1538: Female left nest.

1545: Male arrived with food and fed young.

1550: Male and female returned to nest together; male with food which was transferred to female who fed two young, then stood in nest with wing spread against sun.

1600: Male to nest with food for female only, who continued to stand in the nest with spread wings against westering sun.

1615: Male to nest with food, transferred to female who feeds young.

Note: Number of nestlings - 4.

12.5.1962.

0714: Female in nest facing west.

0715: Male arrived with worm, alighted near nest; flew away to near-by tree and swallowed worm.

0717: Male arrived at nest with food, transferred it to female who fed young; male left immediately.

0720: Female left nest.

0722: Female arrived at nest, looked within and left. Nest untended.

0724: Female returned to nest and sat facing east.

0725: Male with food transferred to female who stood up in nest and fed young.

0729: Male with winged insect sat on edge of nest; female suddenly turned her head, took insect and fed young and herself.

0731: Male with food; female fed young

0735: do.

0737: do.

0739: Female left nest.

0740: Male with food and fed young.

0741: do.

0741½: Female returned to nest but sat on edge.

0742: Female with food followed by male with food; young fed; female sat in nest after feeding, facing east.

0745: Female left nest

0748: Male with food; fed young.

0749: Both birds at nest with food; female arriving first. Fed young and female sat in nest.

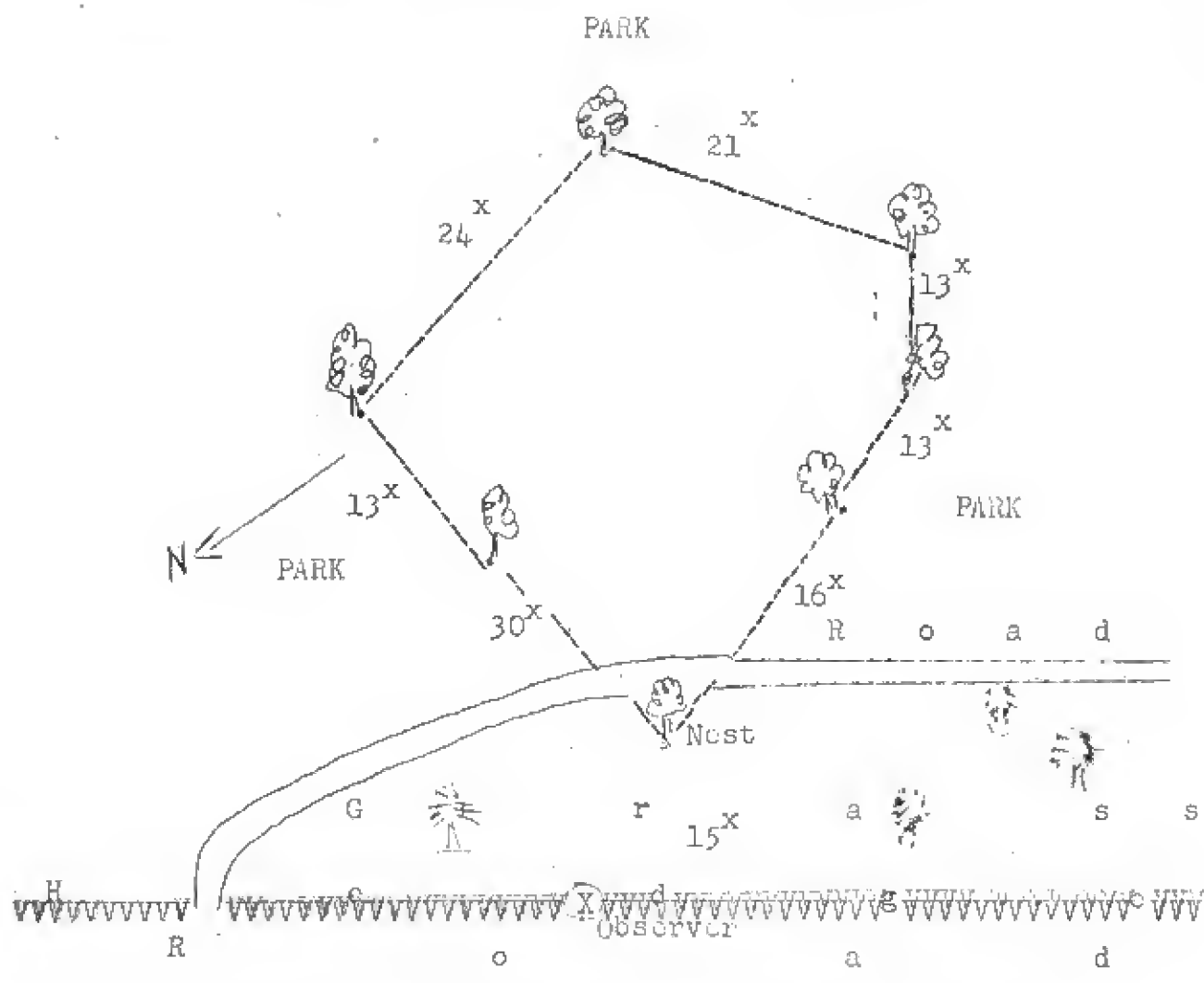
0750: Female left nest.

0752, 0755, 0757, 0800: Male with food; fed young.

0802: Both birds at nest with food and left after feeding young.

0804: Female returned to nest with food and fed young.

0805: Female settled in nest.



Lodi Gardens, New Delhi. Illustrating nesting activities of the Baybacked Shrike

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

THE WRYNECK, JYNX TORQUILLA

I hope I may be forgiven for referring, at this late date, to an article which appeared in the June issue of the Newsletter, but this is due to the fact that I have only recently become a subscriber to the Newsletter, and the June issue has only just come to my notice through the kindness of a friend.

I was most interested in Mrs. Usha Ganguli's article on the Wryneck, Jynx torquilla, and whilst unable to solve her problem, I can, I think, throw some further light upon it.

With reference to paragraph 8 of her article and, in particular, to the differences she lists, I would like to comment on them in the order in which she details them:

1) I feel that the plate in THE FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE to which she refers, is rather small and indistinct, and barely adequate for the settlement of such fine points of detail. THE HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS (Vol. II, p. 294) thus describes the coloration of the chin and throat of adult birds of the European race (J. t. torquilla) in winter plumage: 'apex of chin and along edges of lower mandible white narrowly barred brown-black,

rest of chin and throat buff (varying in shade) barred same.' The corresponding plate (Plate 56 of the same volume) shows a distinct, large, buff patch barred brown covering the chin, cheeks and upper breast.

2) For the same reason as that mentioned at (1) above, I do not think too much importance should be attached to the shape of the 'brown line' as depicted by Petersen. In any case, this line does not appear to be racially diagnostic. THE HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS thus describes the coloration of the 'sides of head' of adult birds of the European race in winter plumage: 'centre portion of ear coverts forming a streak rufous narrowly barred black; rest of ear coverts, lores and under eye buff, sometimes uniform, sometimes barred brown-black.'

The effect of the centre portion of the ear coverts forming a streak is to produce a buff stripe running from the eye backwards and downwards. This is clearly shown in the plate.

3) The plate mentioned at (1) above shows 'the two dark brown lines' extending the full length of the back down as far as the upper tail coverts. THE HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS (Vol. II, p. 296) states that the Japanese race (J. t. japonica) 'has more buff underparts and is slightly smaller than typical form' (J. t. torquilla). It describes the background colour of the main portions of the underparts of the typical form, in winter plumage as 'creamy-white'.

Discrimination between the European and Asiatic races in the field must be extremely difficult, if not impossible. In respect of the specimens he collected during his ornithological survey of Gujarat, Dr. Salim Ali says: 'I can see little constant difference in winter between the typical European race and the Asiatic form chinensis which breeds in Kashmir, and therefore hesitate to assign my specimens to either' (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 52:449). The articles in the Journal were published in book form in 1956 by The Gujarat Research Society, 46-48 Esplanade Mansion, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bombay as THE BIRDS OF GUJARAT, by Salim Ali, and sold at Rs5/-.

I can find no reference whatever to the race himalayana in the literature I possess. Stuart Baker does not mention it in THE FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA series, and, most significantly of all, Dillon Ripley does not recognize the race in his recent A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN.

S.K. Reeves
Surrey, England

OBSERVATIONS ON THE NESTING OF THE PURPLE SUNBIRD,
NECTARINIA ASIATICA, MADE IN SATARA DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA

A pendulous grass nest with a graceful portico fastened to a Lantana shrub about 3 feet from the ground was located on 29th March.

It contained two young ones with well-developed eye furrows indicating that they were about to see the world soon. They were just moving in the nest and were grown enough to lift their head up. The underside was yellow in colour and the back dusky grey, more or less similar to adult female.

On the next day they opened their eyes. Then they were seen

close to the entrance hole keeping their beak at the entrance and waiting for the meals. They had black beaks less curved than the adult's. They were able to spread their wings slightly. Both parents fed the young but the female made more trips with food than the male.

On 3.4.62 about 4.30 p.m. when I went to the site I saw the female feeding the young. After feeding it just pulled one of the young out by its beak. The young one first fell down on the ground. The female immediately went to the rescue. The young gradually got up and stood on its trembling legs. The mother flew up to a near-by bush and started calling. The young started following the mother with short flights. After about ten minutes of these trial flights round about the nest the mother caught the young in its beak by the leg and brought it back to the nest*.

On 5.4.62, i.e. the fifth day after opening their eyes, the young ones made good their flight from the nest, led by the parents.

Components of the nest: The nest was secured to the Lantana stem by means of wood boring caterpillars' faeces and cobweb. The bulk of the nest was made of grasses and dried Lantana leaves. Small pieces of wood bark and a little tow were also found. The inner lining was of smooth grasses and the sun-shade portico was elegantly built with the flowering Mollugo sp.

Measurements of the nest: Total length of the nest: $4\frac{1}{2}$ in.; Max. width: 2 in.; portico protrusion: $1\frac{1}{2}$ in.; length of entrance hole: $1\frac{1}{2}$ in.; diameter: 1 in.; depth of egg chamber: $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Total number of nests seen: 9.

K. Janakiraman
Bat Research Camp, Kelghar,
via Medha, Satara Dist.

*Interesting as this incident is, it requires confirmation, as there appears to be no recorded incident in bird literature.
- Ed.]

REVIEW

THE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN INDIA. By Lt.-Col. H.R. Baker, Indian Army (Retd.) and C.H. Inglis, Curator, Darjeeling Museum. Printed by The Government Press, Madras, 1930.

The book is an early attempt to include in one handy volume information of considerable use to birdwatchers and sportsmen.

In the better integrated India, of Lt.-Col. Baker's time, 'Southern India' meant practically the entire peninsular portion. Therefore, the book covers 544 species in its 500 pages. There are only 22 coloured plates covering 44 species. All plates were supplied by the Bombay Natural History Society. The technique of colour printing cannot be compared favourably with what has been achieved in recent times. The paucity of colour plates, probably forces some birdwatchers to observe more carefully and make notes of details instead of hurriedly turning over the pages of their field book and saying 'Ha! There's the picture of my bird'.

The authors make no pretence of contributing original matter. In fact, most descriptions are excerpts from the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds, or extracts from 'news letters' received by Col. Baker from his friends.

When it comes to the juicier game birds, Col. Baker, who has apparently done quite a bit of birdwatching with a shot gun, gives lengthier accounts. The Great Indian Bustard receives $3\frac{1}{2}$ pages, and the Grey Junglefowl 4 pages. About the former he regrets that

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especially is most delicious and gamey, if, as can be done in the hills, the carcass is hung for a few days before being cooked.'

Short descriptions of orders, families, and genera are included but more recent taxonomists have simplified matters and rendered some of these descriptions redundant.

Books available are not in perfect condition. The type of paper, so much favoured by Governments, has not, fortunately, been so satisfactory to silver fish. The book is sold at the reduced price of Rs10/- plus Rs1.50 for postage. The book may be obtained by sending a money order for Rs11.50 to the Superintendent, Govt. Publications Depot, 166 Mount Road, Madras 2.

S.V. Nilakanta

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Newsletter for Birdwatchers, January 1963:

Reference Mr. Lavkumar's note on the Great Indian Bustard on p 4. One could agree with his view, that indiscriminate shooting, and not the spread of cultivation, is the main or proximate cause of the gradual extermination of this bird, provided the qualifying word 'direct' is inserted before 'cause' and underlined. Personally I feel convinced that it is the increasing spread of cultivation which pushes the bird into closer contact with man and exposes it to his hunger for meat. Advancing cultivation, moreover, brings greater insecurity to its eggs and young directly through human vandalism and indirectly through various predators like jackals, rats, and mongooses that thrive in the neighbourhood of cultivation and human habitations -- and possibly also village dogs.

Thus spread of cultivation and the destructive forces that follow in its wake -- human as well as non-human -- are primarily responsible for squeezing the bustard to its doom. But for cultivation, the pressure on its 'lebensraum' and direct persecution by man and his evil confederates would be far less serious.

As regards the suggestion of breeding bustards in captivity in order to boost the declining natural regeneration, I saw it reported somewhere recently (I cannot recall the source at the moment) that a pair of European Great Bustards (Otis tarda) in captivity had bred -- at least mated and laid an egg (or eggs?). This pair, however, was not of wild caught birds, but hatched from eggs in an incubator and hand reared. Perhaps this method -- or even very young wild caught birds -- might prove successful in the case of our own 'tugdar' also, provided a sufficiently experienced and devoted human foster-father could be found. So now Mr. Lahiri of Alipore Zoo, how about it?

On p. 5, paragraph 2, the Large Hawk-Cuckoo (Cuculus sparverioides) is said to have a call like the Common Hawk-Cuckoo (or Brain-fever Bird - C. varius) but 'less shrill'. My impression is that the call is actually shriller and more piercing! Perhaps this is what the writer meant?

Whenever any birds are described, such as in the note on Cuckoos in Bihar, I suggest that it would be of great advantage for those unfamiliar with the species if the writer gave a reference wherever possible, to some easily accessible illustration, e.g. in THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, or some other.

Short descriptions of orders, families, and genera are included but more recent taxonomists have simplified matters and rendered some of these descriptions redundant.

Books available are not in perfect condition. The type of paper, so much favoured by Governments, has not, fortunately, been so satisfactory to silver fish. The book is sold at the reduced price of Rs10/- plus Rs1.50 for postage. The book may be obtained by sending a money order for Rs11.50 to the Superintendent, Govt. Publications Depot, 166 Mount Road, Madras 2.

S.V. Nilakanta

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Newsletter for Birdwatchers, January 1963:

Reference Mr. Lavkumar's note on the Great Indian Bustard on p 4. One could agree with his view, that indiscriminate shooting, and not the spread of cultivation, is the main or proximate cause of the gradual extermination of this bird, provided the qualifying word 'direct' is inserted before 'cause' and underlined. Personally I feel convinced that it is the increasing spread of cultivation which pushes the bird into closer contact with man and exposes it to his hunger for meat. Advancing cultivation, moreover, brings greater insecurity to its eggs and young directly through human vandalism and indirectly through various predators like jackals, rats, and mongooses that thrive in the neighbourhood of cultivation and human habitations -- and possibly also village dogs.

Thus spread of cultivation and the destructive forces that follow in its wake -- human as well as non-human -- are primarily responsible for squeezing the bustard to its doom. But for cultivation, the pressure on its 'lebensraum' and direct persecution by man and his evil confederates would be far less serious.

As regards the suggestion of breeding bustards in captivity in order to boost the declining natural regeneration, I saw it reported somewhere recently (I cannot recall the source at the moment) that a pair of European Great Bustards (Otis tarda) in captivity had bred -- at least mated and laid an egg (or eggs?). This pair, however, was not of wild caught birds, but hatched from eggs in an incubator and hand reared. Perhaps this method -- or even very young wild caught birds -- might prove successful in the case of our own 'tuqdar' also, provided a sufficiently experienced and devoted human foster-father could be found. So now Mr. Lahiri of Alipore Zoo, how about it?

On p. 5, paragraph 2, the Large Hawk-Cuckoo (Cuculus sparverioides) is said to have a call like the Common Hawk-Cuckoo (or Brain-fever Bird - C. varius) but 'less shrill'. My impression is that the call is actually shriller and more piercing! Perhaps this is what the writer meant?

Whenever any birds are described, such as in the note on Cuckoos in Bihar, I suggest that it would be of great advantage for those unfamiliar with the species if the writer gave a reference wherever possible, to some easily accessible illustration, e.g. in THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, or some other.

Page 11, last paragraph of Mr. P.W. Soman's note. Owing to the structure of a swift's foot and its inability to settle on the

ground and walk about as swallows and martins can, the only way in which it could collect feathers for its nest is of course by 'hawking' them as they float on the air.

Sálim Ali

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Ringling of African Flamingos

Readers may be interested to know that as a result of a cooperative effort by the East African Natural History Society, Karen, Kenya, the British Museum, and the African Flamingo Fund, 8000 young Lesser Flamingos (Phoeniconaias minor) and 80 young Greater Flamingos (Phoenicopterus ruber) were ringed at Lake Magadi, Kenya Colony, this year. The rings used were 16 mm. monel rings supplied by the British Museum, and they were attached above the tibio-tarsal joint on the young birds.

East African Natural History Society is naturally most anxious to learn of any recoveries of rings, which will help to elucidate the movements of Lesser and Greater Flamingos in Africa. Should anyone find a Lesser Flamingo with a ring on its leg, or even the ring itself, the ring should be returned to the Bird Ringing Committee, British Museum ('Nat. Hist. '), Cromwell Road, London S.W.7, with details of the locality and the date.

Although the British Museum will be coordinating all recoveries the East African Natural History Society should be most interested to hear of any locally. Anyone who feels able to do this should also send details of the ring number, date and locality to the Ringing Committee, East African Natural History Society, Coryndon Museum, Nairobi. The ring itself should always be returned to the British Museum.

East African Natural History Society very much hopes that readers will be able to cooperate in this matter.

CORRESPONDENCE

Competition between the Spotted Owlet and the Common Myna

Mr. Poppe (Newsletter 2(4):10) writes that the possession of the 'lodge' of the Spotted Owlet, Athene brama, was 'at other times taken by the Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis)'. In Jaipur City, three owlets were living in a hole in a wall facing our courtyard. The hole was later found to be a straight pouch, about a foot long. Owlets were observed every now and then popping their heads out of the hole. It was also a daily feature to witness three, sometimes four, Common Mynas sitting just near the hole on a projected stone. No sooner the owlet popped its head out the myna attacked it furiously on the face. The owlets were so much attacked by the mynas that they were forced to leave their 'den' and shifted to a Ficus tree, quite near by. One of the pairs of the myna at once acquired the abandoned hole. It was later observed that the other pair of Acridotheres followed the owlets to their new abode on the Ficus tree and succeeded in getting it vacated.

Competition between these two species of birds observed at Basti, U.P. and in Jaipur, Rajasthan, is interesting and warrants further observations.

(Mrs.) Lakshmi I. Prakash,
Jodhpur

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Coloration of the Night Heron

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(Mrs.) Lakshmi I. Prakash,
Jodhpur

Coloration of the Night Heron

Night Herons were abundant at Guntur (Andhra Pradesh) till the

closing of 1961, from when the birds disappeared (possibly a local migration). They were seen flying long before dusk in large flocks. The birds were seen resting in Tamarind trees, by the day. What we noticed was that the colour of the back of the bird was not greenish-black as given in Dr. Salim Ali's book, but deep blue. This colour was visible even from a long distance.

Though the birds have disappeared generally we still see one or two of them at times.

V. Ravi, and the members of Nature
Studying Club of Hindu
College, Guntur

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The Fantail Snipe in Greater Bombay

The capture on 31 December 1962 of a Fantail Snipe while netting swallows at a mangrove roost in the Mahim Creek, off Boran Road, Bandra (Salsette Island) recalls the notes under this species in 'The Birds of Bombay and Salsette' (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 40(4):643, 1939).

Citing E.H. Aitken from his COMMON BIRDS OF BOMBAY the notes say: 'EHA (C.B.B.:167) mentions that snipe were shot on the Flats (meaning chiefly about Mahaluxmi and Tardeo) every year. Conditions have altered greatly since that time and suitable marshes no longer exist within town limits. The snipe have gone the way of the malarial mosquito.'

At the time we captured the Fantail, we were being harried by the urchins of the locality at the nets, and the Kohli (Bombay fisherfolk) section of them recognized the bird. They pleaded that the dimbu (so they called the snipe in Marathi) be given to them for the pot. That these urchins who are otherwise unfamiliar with birds should recognize the snipe and know that it is good eating suggests that snipe, as it did in the days of EHA, still keeps on visiting and feeding in such swamps, marshes, and tidal creeks as are yet available within the limits of what is now Greater Bombay. The bird may still be commoner than it seems, about the filthy tidal marshes at Dharavi and elsewhere, but overlooked for the reason suggested by EHA in his own inimitable way. Says he 'the peculiarity of the Snipe is that it is rarely seen except by those who seek its destruction' (C.B.B.:167). And Greater Bombay and Salsette Island are now totally closed to shooting.

J.S. Serrao

/Dimbu (also dimbul or timbul) presumably is the general name for all small sandpiper-like birds, and not for the snipe specifically. - Ed.7

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 March



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OUR FINE-FEATHERED FRIENDS

After reading Mr. Tinsley's article 'Our Fine-feathered enemies' (Life International Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 9 - 1962), I was not quite sure whether to take it seriously or just treat it as the attempt of someone to attract attention to himself by standing on his head! After reading and re-reading it, however, I came to the conclusion that a critical analysis, at least, was necessary.

The main burden of Mr. Tinsley's attack is that birds create unsightly spots in cities, are carriers of different Virus diseases, and in certain instances, are positively damaging and harmful; specially those birds that have become commensals of Man in one way or another.

Agreed, that pigeon's nests and droppings do not add to the beauty of a structure, a pertinent question is, who is responsible for creating conditions that cause a population explosion amongst them? The answer is MAN. By creating artificial jungles of brick, concrete and steel he has driven away the natural checks, particularly birds of prey, that prevent pigeons or starlings from becoming a nuisance, and then he turns round and complains about it. So typical of the logic of civilized Homo sapiens. And the remedy? To embark on an orgy of killing. No one has heard of pigeons and starlings becoming a menace either in great open spaces or in the jungles. As for 'bird-nuts' protesting against 'civilized man' taking steps for his comfort and survival, has the writer forgotten similar steps taken by his forefathers in the early days of American colonization? Forests were cut down, swamps drained, large stretches of the Prairie set on fire. The result? The biggest dust bowl in the world, ghost cities, dried up streams and rivers, fertile acres turned to barren eroded wastes. The U.S.A. is now faced with a bill that runs into several thousand million dollars to

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Agreed, that pigeon's nests and droppings do not add to the beauty of a structure, a pertinent question is, who is responsible for creating conditions that cause a population explosion amongst them? The answer is MAN. By creating artificial jungles of brick, concrete and steel he has driven away the natural checks, particularly birds of prey, that prevent pigeons or starlings from becoming a nuisance, and then he turns round and complains about it. So typical of the logic of civilized Homo sapiens. And the remedy? To embark on an orgy of killing. No one has heard of pigeons and starlings becoming a menace either in great open spaces or in the jungles. As for 'bird-nuts' protesting against 'civilized man' taking steps for his comfort and survival, has the writer forgotten similar steps taken by his forefathers in the early days of American colonization? Forests were cut down, swamps drained, large stretches of the Prairie set on fire. The result? The biggest dust bowl in the world, ghost cities, dried up streams and rivers, fertile acres turned to barren eroded wastes. The U.S.A. is now faced with a bill that runs into several thousand million dollars to undo

the effects of such steps.

Any change in conditions always has effects, which in due course affect the entire animal kingdom, as well as the vegetation. The beginnings may be humble, but so delicate is the balance of Nature that decreases or increases of any species react on all others, favourably or unfavourably. Mr. Martin Duncan cites the very interesting example of an owl, a field mouse, a humble-bee, a flower head of red clover and a farmer. Owls prey on mice and all kind-red rodents, who in turn feed on the honey stored in the hives of the humble-bee and the corn ricks. The fertilization of the clover and production of seed depends on the number of humble-bees present, because they alone can transfer the pollen from one flower to another. Therefore, if the owls are reduced in number, the rodents multiply, and by swallowing all the honey kill off the humble-bees offspring. The bees are decimated and the output of clover seeds goes down. When the honey runs out the rodents turn their attention to the farmer's corn ricks. But owls prevent Mr. Tinsley from sleeping soundly at night and therefore, must be exterminated!

Not that attempts have not been made to exterminate birds considered to be enemies. In 1899 Scotch farmers shot hundreds of Rooks and destroyed thousands of their eggs. An injurious grub became so prolific that since then Rooks have been left severely alone. More recently, China launched an all out attack upon sparrows, which most civilized men regard as a nuisance and a grain thief. The sparrows were almost wiped out, but the subsequent year China faced one of the biggest famines in history, and has not recovered fully from it even now. The Chinese forgot that in a single year a pair of sparrows destroy something like 250,000 insects. If sparrows are allowed to be kept in check by natural means, such as birds of prey, they never become a menace. But the fact is that birds of prey have been persecuted since the days of Adam, in the interests of game preservation. So far pigeons have not been exterminated from any area; but it is certain that such a step will result in something equally disastrous.

The major vectors of virus infections are insects, particularly of the bug family. Birds alone keep them in check. On the other hand diseases spread by birds are almost negligible. At any rate there are no records of any epidemics of psittacosis, encephalitis or histoplasmosis, caused by birds. And why blame the birds alone? The only known carrier of Infective Hepatitis is Man himself, and this can break out in epidemic form. The same is true of venereal diseases, Man is the only vector, and these diseases are more prevalent now than ever before.

Human innovations always lead to troubles with birds, on account of their specialized habits, and the grouping of starlings on airfields is a case in point. In the incident cited, along with the plane-load of men, several hundred innocent and helpless birds were killed as well. This is a nice commentary on our civilization and humanistic behaviour that we think nothing of this mass murder. The obvious remedy is to change the location of the airfield, because birds do not congregate everywhere. Such places are known in advance and should be avoided by aircraft. There is no practical way of removing them; attempts at destruction are useless as others will always come in to take the place of those destroyed. One can only hope that in time birds will learn to avoid aircraft, just as they do telegraph wires, automobiles, and other modern engines of destruction.

The greatest consideration in favour of birds, however, is that these disadvantages are microscopic compared with the advantages.

To take only one case, the damage caused by rats and similar rodents to agricultural crops is several times that caused by birds, and if birds are eliminated, the burden will become unbearable. It is estimated that in spite of the activities of birds, insects still succeed in destroying nearly 10% of the agricultural produce of the U.S.A., and the value was placed by Hinds in 1934 at \$2500 million or at present day prices \$10,000 million. It is interesting to recall that for the fiscal year 1962-63 President Kennedy has asked Congress to sanction \$53,000 million for defence, and this is the biggest defence budget in the world. For India the loss was estimated in 1921 as worth Rs185 crores, and at present prices would amount to Rs740 crores, or nearly equal to the entire Revenue expenditure of the Government of India. What those figures would be if insects were allowed to multiply unchecked by birds, is something which staggers the imagination. The people of France once in the 19th century tried to live without birds, and then came to the conclusion that 'birds can live without man, but man cannot survive without birds'. The story can be repeated so many times. The Australians found the fishing on the River Murray deteriorating, ascribed this to the Cormorants, and promptly destroyed cormorants in large numbers. The fishing got worse, and then it was found that along with some fish, the cormorants destroyed large numbers of crabs, eels, and other enemies of fish spawn. Their protective value was far greater than their destructive.

Let us for a moment try to picture a birdless world. It would be a desolate wilderness, without a leaf on any tree, a flower anywhere, and in due course without a single plant growing. Agriculture would become impossible and human life intolerable. Hordes of caterpillars would immobilise our trains by committing mass suicide beneath locomotive wheels. Birds provide the best check upon the multiplication of insects, as also upon rodents, small mammals and obnoxious weeds. Without birds, the world would be taken over by insects, and practically all other forms of life, animal or plant, would become extinct. Indeed, one of the best friends of Man in wild Nature are birds.

The trouble arises by considering species in isolation. No one species can be considered apart from the fauna of which it forms a part. There is a finely adjusted balance in Nature, in which every single species has a vital role to play. Even a seemingly injurious species cannot be eliminated without disturbing this delicate balance and producing results disastrous to Mankind. The vulture-like ladies who lobby for birds, are doing nothing more than giving Mr. Tinsley an elementary lesson in self preservation, because bird life, as a whole is undoubtedly beneficial to human interests in the highest degree.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara

BIRDS IN LADAKH IN WINTER

A brief visit to Ladakh recently gave me an opportunity to see some of the birds there in winter. Unfortunately work prevented me doing any intensive observation but the following notes may be of interest.

I reached Leh on December 15. It was a bright sunny morning with a sprinkling of snow on the ground. The altitude of the saucer-shaped valley at this point runs between 11,000 and 11,500 feet. The ground is covered with fine beige dust. The few poplars and willows were stark and bare, and the temperature was around freezing, dropping at night to minus ten centigrade.

Magpies (Pica pica bactriana) scavenging around the town were

the most noticeable birds. They were very bold and only moved away when they became conscious that undue interest was being taken in them. There were large numbers of Carrion Crows (Corvus corone orientalis), and flocks of House Sparrows (Passer domesticus parvini). A party of Turkestan Rock Pigeons (Columba rupestris) flew over, and frequently Lammergeiers (Gypaetus barbatus) soared overhead. I saw one Himalayan Griffon Vulture (Gyps himalayensis) planing over the valley. An occasional solitary Tibetan Raven (Corvus corax) hung around.

In the bare branches of the trees there were Kashmir Grey Tits (Parus major caschmirensis), and the Robin Hedge Sparrow (Prunella rubeculoides). I saw one Guldenstadts Redstart (Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis) with them. This beautiful bird, which resembles the Whitcapped Himalayan Redstart (Chaimarrornis leucocephalus) with the addition of white wing patches, was also to be seen alongside the frozen Indus River southeast of Leh.

I went by jeep for about 140 miles southeast along the Indus. Some 30 miles from Leh the valley narrows to a gorge about 50 miles long, and by this time no trees are to be seen. There is an occasional patch of coarse vegetation. The river was frozen over, except for one point where vapour rose from a hot spring in the river bed. On a patch of clear water in the gorge I saw a Moorhen (Gallinula chloropus).

The gorge finally opens out into a broad desert plain. This is a very arid area and despite the season and the cold there was only a light dusting of snow on surrounding mountains of 20,000 ft. or more. The river valley is about 15,000 ft. A huge dark predator was tugging at some carrion. I should like to think it was a Golden Eagle (Aquila chrysaetus hodgsoni), but we were unable to stop the jeep as we were ploughing through dust in four wheel drive and I could not use my binoculars.

Ravens scavenged around Army camps in this barren area. The most common bird, however, was the Shore Lark (Eremophila alpestris elwesi), an attractive little lark with black horns, cheek patches, and breast band. With them were some Short-toed Larks (Calandrella acutirostris). They flew past constantly as I climbed a hillside and were also feeding near an Army camp, although it was difficult to see anything but dust.

I did not meet any birdwatchers among the Army there, but if there are one or two they would be able to contribute a lot to Indian ornithology since they are likely to be resident in areas where only occasional travellers have passed.

Peter Jackson
Reuter, New Delhi

THE PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA

My first serious expedition in bird watching, shortly after becoming a convert to this pastime was on a Sunday morning in August last year when I went to see the Pheasant-tailed Jacana.

Mr. Serrao of the Bombay Natural History Society kindly offered to take me to a place where these birds could be seen, and we motored out at about 10 a.m. along with Serrao's teenage niece and my little son.

We reached the Jacana's habitat half an hour later, a lily covered tank approximately 300 yards square outside at Kalina near the Santa Cruz airport.

The tank is next to St. Mary's High School, and our appearance attracted an assorted collection of little boys to whom, it was quite obvious, Serrao was both uncle and hero. S remarked they were his henchmen and rendered valuable service, although bribery and corruption in the shape of sweets helped to oil the wheels.

With the help of a couple of these lads we unfastened a tin boat which was shackled with an impressive chain and padlock to a post and launched it, embarking as we did so like the Owl and the Pussycat and a few more.

The tin boat did not inspire confidence but as we could all swim it did not matter. Besides it was drizzling any way. I brooded a trifle anxiously over my new binoculars.

We spotted the first Jacana almost immediately, about 30 yards away, and after we had all viewed it through the binoculars, paddled and poled the tub in the direction of a clutch which Serrao had visited the previous week.

The nest, a floating pad of wild rice (dev-bhat), was neatly hidden among the reeds and consisted of nothing more than a few reed pieces as lining, holding four coffee coloured eggs about 37 x 28mm. A clutch has normally four eggs but sometimes may have as many as six. The colour of the eggs, Serrao told me changes from dark coffee or bronze when newly laid to bluish white just before they hatch, a matter of 26/27 days from the laying of the first egg.

A hide had been constructed a dozen feet away from the nest but as I had not brought a camera we decided to get a closer view of the birds. We had now spotted three or four of them.

The female Jacana is larger than the male, and has the last word. After accepting a nest, and laying her eggs, she tells hubby to take over and with a perfunctory goodbye flung over her shoulder is off shopping -- for another husband. In her own way, though, she serves the clan by laying as many eggs as possible -- quite a wearisome job when you come to think of it -- so do not dismiss her lightly as fickle.

A large percentage of the eggs have a dim future either ending up inside hungry birds (the ubiquitous crow is one such frequent and unwelcome visitor to the Jacana household) or at the bottom of the lake if the eggs get dislodged from the nest as happens when there is a storm. This unfortunately did happen, Serrao told me a few weeks later, to the clutch we inspected.

Mister Jacana has a highly developed sense of responsibility. Immediately after his wife deserts him he forgets her, which is just as well for him, and becomes an extremely devoted parent. From a chap quite docile and humble when Missus was around, he turns into a resourceful and cunning fellow.

Serrao proved this by taking us to a secluded part of the tank, where he said there were some Jacana chicks. As we approached the place (not without difficulty because paddling and poling through the thickly growing reeds was tough work and brought to mind Amundsen and others hemmed in by ice floes) Father Jacana expressed his distress by exhibiting in rapid succession his repertoire of tricks.

First it appeared he had a broken wing and was an easy prey to a predator. When the ruse did not work he zigzagged off in all directions like Leacock's horseman as though his young ones were anywhere but where we were heading. Failing to achieve his purpose he next turned into a Viking and pretended he meant to dive bomb us. We thought then we would leave him in peace and did so, father becoming placid and unconcerned the moment he saw our interest lay elsewhere. We did not see the chicks which were either hiding among the reeds or had submerged.

In another corner of the tank we saw enacted the drama of the eternal triangle. There is no escape from this even for Jacanas.

There were mock attacks and retreats. At times it looked too as though the female was making a pretence of attacking one or other of her suitors. It could be she was only trying to get them to make up their minds. Quite clearly she thought three was a crowd.

On the way back from the Jacana tank and at about 1 p.m. we stopped on the Western Express Highway (which at the time and I daresay even now, is a continuous chain of ghastly potholes) opposite the Bandra East Housing Colony, about half a mile from where the Highway meets the Mahim Causeway. In the marshes there we thought we might see some waders.

First however we had to wade, ourselves, through an open sewer between the Highway and the Housing Colony. The smelly, soupy muck was nearly knee deep and although Serrao, a keen naturalist that he is, sloshed blithely through it, I was for a whole squelchy minute acutely uncomfortable thinking of the millions of microbes gambolling in my golf shoes. However, I was able to put the thought of them out of my mind when I saw the teeming bird life in the marshes.

We spotted Blackwinged Stilts, Common- and Spotted Sandpipers, and Curlews; also a couple of Pied Mynas.

The return through the sewer wasn't half as bad as the first time, and on the whole I felt it had been an extremely enjoyable morning's outing.

S. Ranganathan

MARCH

The month of March, is an interesting month in this part of the country. We experience the return migration of birds from their winter quarters in the more southern parts of peninsular India, and possibly Ceylon as well. It is well that a keen birdwatcher should try to find time to be out with his binoculars and a notebook, in the field as often as possible. He will see many interesting old friends who had passed him on their inward migration after the monsoon, and he will now see these same birds in their summer plumage, much brighter than ever; in many cases their plumage will be quite unlike the autumn plumage, while some birds will still be partly moulting into their nuptial fineries.

The Yellow Wagtails make a very active and beautiful show on wet grass along river banks and in irrigated fields. There are very large numbers around for a short time. This is the time really to get binoculars trained on them, for now one can identify them more readily. Large numbers of Tree Pipits

spend a few days around shady groves of trees quietly feeding on the ground, and then suddenly one day they are gone. Also to be seen in fair numbers are the Common Swallows and all of them are beautiful in their glossy attire. The western and the eastern races can now be readily made out by the amount of pink in the lower plumage. By the end of the month almost all of them will have gone, though a few will be met even later in the hot season. In fact this swallow comes in rather early and stragglers will put in an appearance in early August. Last year in this month, we had a very strong migration of the Wiretailed Swallows, which are generally supposed to be resident birds. It was quite obvious by the large numbers which were around for a few days only, that the augmented numbers were in reality passage migrants.

In gardens there is a sudden influx of Redbreasted Flycatchers, the males looking very bright with their red shirt-fronts. They are recognizable by their clicking sounds and a single whistle uttered at regular intervals interspersing the clicks. The sound is very subdued and very likely to be overlooked unless one is observant. It is surprising how common these little flycatchers are during this month. Redstarts are also around in greater numbers and the males are wonderfully bright. It is interesting to see how very active these little birds are when they put in an appearance for the winter and just before they depart for the summer; they almost seem to be nervous about something and fly from one perch to another very agitatedly and seldom give a good view of themselves as they do in winter, when they hop around confidently on the ground and often at a very close range at that. Willow Warblers of various types are also proclaimed by their sounds, and they too seem to be here for a few days and then they are no more. They appear to arrive and depart in waves.

All the while, the resident birds are calling loudly, more so as the days become hotter and hotter -- the Tailorbirds, Copper-smiths, and the Koels. The Sunbirds have got half way through their nesting and some of the males are already looking very dilapidated after their glittering winter apparel. But they are still singing with great vigour and will do so through most of the early part of summer. I am looking forward to the flowering of the Flame of the Forest (Butea monosperma) trees, when they will make a flaming show against a blue sky and their flower-laden branches will be thronged with Purple Sunbirds, bright green parakeets in festive best and those most interesting of all little birds, the White-eyes, which alas are not resident in this part of Saurashtra, but spread out in winter from the breeding grounds in the Gir.

For a beginner there is nothing better than to keep a detailed diary of the going on in the avian world, and sooner than expected, there will be quite a good amount of material at hand, and it is only by looking at the familiar birds, that the rarer ones will be met and of course immediately identified.

I have just received the very interesting KEY TO THE WATERFOWL OF THE WORLD, by Peter Scott, and reading about them, it reminds me that with the rising mercury, most of the duck will be moving north. However, we have a fair number of Garganey Teal around well into the summer and isolated parties of the Common Teal hang around even through the hot months, but these might well be wounded birds which are not in a position to undergo the long flight north. Brahminy Duck very often stay on through March, but their migration is not very spectacular, and their summer breeding grounds are very close, just across the Himalayas on the Tibetan lakes. Talking of Garganey Teal, I would like to record the fact that we had for long considered these duck to be passage migrants, but now after seeing them on some of the waters around Rajkot, I have come to the conclusion that they winter with us, and are quite common almost throughout the season, and again are the very last to remain here in appreciable flocks. It is interesting to

note that they are partial to sewage waters and in this preference they have something in common with Shovellers. Both these duck inhabit the dirty waters of the Aji River below the city.

In the open countryside, where the summer winds are now strong and dust raising, though not hot, the Great Grey Shrikes will be breeding, and their nests, which are deep well-constructed cups of sticks, fibres, and very comfortably lined with all the softest material to hand, are placed inside the thickest of babool trees; with them are the Large Grey Babblers in noisy parties, very amorously inclined and rather garrulous. In tall fodder crops, the Indian Wren Warblers will soon start thrilling in a wheezy song preparatory to pair formation. In fact, all our residential birds are now becoming active, and to the birdwatcher, summer with all its discomforts, is as rewarding as any of the other periods of the year. No really, for the enthusiastic naturalist every season is to be looked forward to; that is why it is so very worthwhile to be fond of wild things.

K.S. Lavkumar
Rajkot

HOUSE SPARROWS AS SUBTENANTS

A pair of kites (Milvus migrans) used to build their nest in a banyan tree situated in a ship repair workshop. In the last few years, increasing use of the tree for nest building is being made by House Crows. Part of the nesting season of late kites and early crows overlaps.

For various reasons the young kites used to die before being able to fly. They were continuously harassed by crows for one thing, and by body vermin for another. They also appeared to suffer much from thirst in the hot months. One or other of the parents had to keep a constant vigil against marauding crows. In five years only one young kite grew up to fly away.

Last year the kites shifted their nesting site to the framework of a water tank in an adjoining shipyard. The tank is supported on long steel columns, with the usual diagonal and horizontal bracings of angles. The nest was constructed in the topmost tier of angles, against a vertical column at about 40 ft. from the ground.

This year, the nest was repaired and the eggs laid, very early in the cool weather. The two nestlings are already (6th Feb.) larger than House Crows and can be seen exercising their wings.

On the 11 of January, while observing the young kites, I noticed a House Sparrow (Passer domesticus) flying straight into the kite nest. The sparrow was joined by its mate which also vanished under the kites' nest. Further observation proved that the sparrows were carrying building material. With the help of field glasses, it has now been ascertained that the sparrows are nesting under and partly within the kites' nest. The straw and grass of the sparrows' nest is wedged firmly in the untidy overhanging lower sticks of the kites' nest. A straw nest, at a height of 40 ft. from the ground and constructed in any other corner of the tank truss is likely to be blown away by the wind.

The sparrows seldom fly straight into the nest. They usually perch on one of the steel diagonals and hop upwards to the nest.

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The sparrows seldom fly straight into the nest. They usually perch on one of the steel diagonals and hop upwards to the nest.

I wondered what would happen to the young sparrows, when they start their flying lessons. The possibility of one of the kites catching a young sparrow for breakfast, seemed likely. Now, having seen how fast the young kites were developing, it appears that they will desert their nest and fly away before the young sparrows venture out.

It may be interesting to mention that as many as eight crow families had the banyan tree to themselves for nesting last year. Mother crows could hop off their nest, feed on banyan fruit and get back to egg sitting in a few minutes. Whenever the sun shone on their beautiful blue eggs, the crows allowed the sun to keep the eggs warm and went around enjoying themselves.

S.V. Nilakanta

WHITE IBIS AND CATTLE EGRET IN ENGLAND

Since writing my note on the occurrence of the Houbara or Macqueen's Bustard in Suffolk (Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 3), it occurred to me that, although the occurrences took place some time ago, it may be of interest to record the appearance in England of two common Indian birds, namely the White Ibis (Threskiornis melanoccephala) and the Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis).

The White Ibis stayed for a week or more at Grove Ferry, 8 miles NE. of Canterbury in Kent. My friend and I must have been the last birdwatchers to see the bird, on the 27 August 1961, during its stay in this country.

We had just got to the marsh, which the bird had been frequenting when someone fired a shot, and all the birds on the marsh took to wing, including the Ibis.

We watched it in flight for about ten minutes, as it flew around at a considerable height and then disappeared into the distance over some hills and was lost to view. As far as we could ascertain, this was the last that was seen of it. We were most disappointed to have been denied the opportunity of seeing it on the ground and at close quarters.

It was evidently a juvenile bird, as the neck was feathered with what appeared to be perfectly white feathers.

There is, of course, the possibility that the bird was one that had escaped from captivity, but if the record is officially accepted it will be a new bird for the British List.

Three or four Cattle Egrets were seen on, or about, the 27 April 1962 by a farmer on his land, 3 or 4 miles NW. of Bognor Regis in Sussex. The farmer, who was somewhat interested in birds, realised that they were most uncommon in this country and that he ought, in consequence, to acquaint ornithological circles with his discovery. He could have done no better than what he did, which was to contact that very experienced and well-known ornithologist, Major W.W.A. Phillips, one of our readers, and who was of course very familiar with the bird during many years of residence in India and Ceylon. Major Phillips was thus the first person to identify the birds.

My friends and I had arranged to spend the 29th April bird watching with Major Phillips, always, incidentally, both an instructive and enjoyable experience, and were thrilled when he met us and gave us the khubba* that there was still one of the party left for us to see.

Apparently for khabar (Hindi) = news. - Ed./..... 10

This we lost no time in doing and were treated for about an hour to excellent views of the bird both on the ground, feeding among cattle and sheep, and in flight. Subspecific identification, however, was not possible.

This is only the third occasion on which the species has been seen in this country, the previous being in 1917.

Apropos of this subject of birds common to Britain and India, Douglas Dewar discusses it in the first chapter of his charming book *BIRDS OF THE PLAINS*, and in an Appendix lists 184 such species. Since the time that Dewar was writing, data on the subject has accrued considerably, and in an idle moment or two of browsing in the literature I increased the number to 200, and a little research would doubtless advance it even farther.

S.K. Reeves
Surrey, England

REVIEW

BIRDS FROM BRITANNIA. By H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh. pp. 215, 59 plates. London, 1962. Longmans.

The first time the Duke of Edinburgh ever deliberately took a photograph of a bird was while the 'Britannia' was rounding Cape Horn on the voyage back from Australia in 1956. The long days at sea when 'our only company were the seabirds of the southern oceans' started a new interest in birdwatching as well as bird photography, although 'needless to say not one of the photographs I took on that leg of the journey is printable'. Three years later, on a second almost round-the-world trip he was taking pictures which were very printable indeed. This book is a collection of the best photographs taken on these two trips held together with an amusing commentary on the whole trip.

The range of the two cruises covered the whole of the Southern Hemisphere, from the tropics to the Antarctic islands. And it is the pictures of the birds of the Antarctica -- the penguins, the petrels, the ducks -- which readers will find the most fascinating in the book. There are comparatively few pictures of these birds in existence for the reason that there are a few people who have the chance to go to these places. Another wonderful group are the pictures of the sea birds in flight, taken from the deck of the yacht. These include the albatrosses, the gulls, and terns, the boobies, the noddies, and the various ducks. It was, indeed, mainly while the ship was moving that the Duke of Edinburgh had the time to concentrate on birdwatching and photography. As soon as they touched land, the necessity for doing the chores which attached to his station cut into the time he could devote to photography. Nevertheless, he did manage to put in a couple of days of strenuous photography on land as well, and this has added some fine pictures of tropical birds.

The Duke of Edinburgh does not consider himself an ornithologist; the last section of the book written by Capt. G.S. Tuck, consists of ornithological notes on the birds mentioned in the book. Commander Hughes has done some very fine drawings to illustrate these notes.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Calls of Birds

With the approach of March birds have started to sing. The Iora's long drawn whistle (one full octave according to Whistler), the Golden Oriole's rich tri-syllabic notes, the dainty 13-note song of the Spotted Fantail Flycatcher, the steady outpourings of the Magpie Robin, the vivacious twittering of Sunbirds, the unending towit, towit of Tailor Birds, and the forceful teen, teen, teen of Ashy Wren Warblers add a new pleasure to a stroll in the garden. Latterly a Large Cuckoo Shrike has been seen around. I do not recall seeing this bird here before. Its call is loud and piercing -- a double note the second higher than the first -- and can be heard distinctly from about 200 yards away.

Describing bird calls is a most difficult business. Crows and kites are easy to deal with caw, caw, and chee-ee, chee-ee. But other sounds are not easy to convey by words unless one hits upon a phrase which catches the accents correctly like Did he do it? for the Lapsing, and Crossword puzzle of the Indian Cuckoo. How can one describe the pleasing and sustained singing of the Magpie Robin? Would any of our readers try and make the attempt? Ornithologists so far have not been too successful in dealing with this problem. The tabulation below shows the manner in which Salim Ali and Hugh Whistler have described the calls of some of our birds.

	<u>Whistler</u>	<u>Salim Ali</u>
Common Iora	A long drawn wail <u>wa-o-o-e-tu</u> , with a sudden drop of an octave on the last syllable	Sweet long drawn musical whistle and short chirrups. Its Hindi name <u>Shoubhagi</u> is onomatopoeic.
Redvented Bulbul	There is something extremely cheerful and attractive about the voice of a Bulbul, though he has only one or two call notes and no song.	Has no song as such but its joyous notes ... make it a welcome visitor to every garden.
Purplerumped Sunbird	The call is a feeble shrill sort of chirp easily distinguishable from the louder call of the Purple Sunbird.	The male sings excitedly --- <u>tityou, tityou, tityou tr-r-r-r-tit</u> and so on.
Golden Oriole	...loud mellow whistle <u>pee-ee-a</u> or <u>whee-a-ee</u> is one of the pleasantest and most familiar of Indian bird sounds. ...There is, in addition, a faint but very sweet and plaintive song, though from its very faintness it is little known.	A harsh <u>checah</u> and clear fluty whistles something like <u>peelolo</u> .

Magpie Robin Cock bird ... pours
out his delicious
song.

During non-breeding season the male utters a plaintive swee-ee and a harsh chur-r. During breeding season male sings lustily.

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Need for an 'Abstracts' section in our Newsletter

Some readers have suggested that it would be desirable to have a section where gleanings from various bird magazines are presented in a condensed form. This could be done if members make it a point to send in notes of interesting matter which they come across. Each abstract can be just a 100-250 words and its main purpose should be to draw attention to the original article.

To make a start with this, The Ring for November 1962 contains an article by the Editor on the longevity of birds. To come to correct conclusions about the age of wild birds is understandably a difficult problem. But recoveries of ringed birds make it possible to come to some definite conclusions. It is quite surprising how long some birds live; a few are reproduced here:

<u>Ardea cinerea</u> : Grey Heron	...	24 yrs 6 months	
<u>Anas platyrhynchos</u> : Mallard	...	20	1 " 25 days
<u>Buteo buteo</u> : Common Buzzard	...	23	9 20
<u>Pandion haliaetus</u> : Osprey	...	20	11 12
<u>Falco tinnunculus</u> : Kestrel	...	16	2 0
<u>Coturnix coturnix</u> : Common Quail	...	7	6 24
<u>Haemaphysalis ostralegus</u> : Oystercatcher	...	28	5 9
<u>Capella gallinago</u> : Snipe	...	7	2 25
<u>Numenius arquata</u> : Curlew	...	31	6 21
<u>Larus argentatus</u> : Blackheaded Gull	...	30	3 12
<u>Hirundo rustica</u> : Common Swallow	...	25	11 18
<u>Motacilla alba</u> : White Wagtail	...	5	0 2
<u>Sturnus roseus</u> : Rosy Pastor	...	21	0 0
<u>Passer domesticus</u> : House Sparrow	...	8	1 24

CORRESPONDENCE

Newsletter for Birdwatchers Vol.3, No. 2, Feb. 1963

1. How exciting it must be for a birdwatcher and for shikaris to be able to hear the challenging call of the Painted Partridge for the first time in the grass of Rajasthan. There is little doubt that the recording of this frankolin from Rajasthan means a spread of the species as claimed by Mr. S.C. Sharma, as had this bird been originally in the area it would have not been missed in a State where shikar was on the daily itinerary of people who mattered. It might be interesting to enquire if the Black Partridge which replaces this species in North India is also found side by side.

I have travelled several times along the metro gauge line from Gujarat to Delhi and have noted a rather extensive area of very interesting grass-covered hills between Mt. Abu and Erinpur, where there is the new irrigation works. Was this area ever the original home of pictus? It is a very suitable country.

2. Capt. N.S. Tyabji has really provided a very interesting sketch of the territory of a breeding pair of Lanius vittatus. The area occupied by the pair now was it so restricted because of other pairs holding lease of adjacent lots, or does this represent the saturation maximum required by the pair? We could well follow up this interesting study with the same species in other parts of the country as this shrike is a very charming bird and is quite a conspicuous personality. I might suggest marking them with various dyes so as to make them more recognizable, and here is a very simple method of trapping a required bird. I have done it myself. Two strips of cane, tied cross-wise, and bent to form a raised frame, should hold a cricket dangled in the centre by a fine string. The ends of the 'legs' are to be smeared by semi-hardened latex of the pipal (Ficus religiosa). This contraption is to be placed in an open space in full view of the desired bird and without fail the keen-eyed hunter will fly down for the kicking insect and get entangled. After removing it, the feathers should be carefully cleaned with a little spirit. The white breast could be daubed with some gay colour, and the bird released. The entire operation needs to be done with respect for the curved tip of the shrikean beak. Shrikes know how to use their beaks!

3. Could the East African Natural History Society let us know at what stage in the life of the young flamingos did they put the rings on? In the Rann of Kutch, the possibilities are great, but in the running stage there is but a most ignominiously muddy future for the prospective bander of running chicks. The results are not worth the breath and ensuing loss of good clothing!

4. The snipe seems to cause much comment whenever it turns up, and readers of the back numbers of the Journal of the Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. will no doubt have read many notes on snipe feeding in the open and the like. Snipe are really quite common in winter, but their habitat and their wonderful camouflage render them invisible to all but those who 'seek their destruction', and for that matter to those like the humble birdwatchers who certainly do not entertain anything but the best of regards for the dimbu. It is indeed astounding how few people have ever seen so gorgeous a bird as the Golden Oriole, though it enhances its colours by loud and distinctive calls both attractive as well as harsh. What chance then a snipe which courts seclusion?

K.S. Lavkumar

* * * *

Wagtail and Swallow Roosts in Calcutta

I had been to the Salt Lake with my colleagues in search of a wagtail roost on Monday, the 5th February. We located a very big wagtail roost and a Swallow (Hirundo rustica) roosts. Wagtails were in thousands and the Swallows in hundreds! Both the roosts are in the same reeds standing in 2 to 5 ft. depth of water, side by side.

P.V. George

/Readers' attention is drawn to the article Wagtail Roost in Kerala, in Vol. 2(4), April 1962, issue of the Newsletter.
-- Ed./

* * * *

Bird News from Delhi

On 3 February we had gone out birding. ... This was one of our rare Birdwatching Society's trips. Capt. Tyabji was there with four other men. We saw a lot of birds including nine flamingos, a solitary pelican, a lone ~~ant~~ curlew, and one Imperial Sandgrouse. ... Robert Fleming (Dr. Fleming's son) is coming to Mussoorie to teach biology. He is doing his Ph.D. on the Whistling Thrush. He will be coming to Delhi too.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
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R e m i n d e r

Readers are requested to send in their subscription for the current year if they have already not done so.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 April



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FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 3, No. 4

April 1963

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BIRDS AROUND BOMBAY : A VISITOR'S IMPRESSIONS

For a birdwatcher coming from England, to step off a boat at Bombay is twice as exciting as it must be for an ordinary visitor. Not only has one entered a completely new human world, but also a complete new world full of wonderful new birds.

At first all one can do is to sink low in the scale of ornithologists to become what we call a 'tick hunter' or maniac tally-list increaser. And this is what happened to me.

Just for the record, the first bird I saw was completely new to me was your redoubtable House Crow. After that I saw only Pariah Kites and Blackheaded Gulls, both of which we have in Europe, until I reached Andheri, where I saw about ten new species without moving from a comfortable chair in the editor's garden. In the heat (your winter is hot to us) I fell asleep for a few minutes, to be awoken by a Koel with its loud and abruptly ringing call. I rose abruptly too, and stared at this no doubt to you a common garden bird, with great interest as it moved through the branches of a mango tree, and then ticked it on my list. Among the ten birds I saw were the Whitebacked Vulture and the Magpie Robin, which was tuning up for its summer song.

The first full day in this country produced 47 new species. We went north of the city into the fertile vegetable-growing area, where there was a great variety of habitat ranging from aquatic

to heavy scrubland. Near the water we saw Large Egrets, Pond Herons, and the Gullbilled Tern, a species that occurs occasionally in England, is known to have bred once, and is otherwise quite widely distributed in Europe. A most interesting and beautiful water bird is the Whitebreasted Kingfisher, which at first I could only hear calling, but later I caught a glimpse as it flashed past us. We only have one species of kingfisher in Europe, the Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) which apart from being a larger race, is identical to the Common Kingfisher here. Our Kingfisher is well known at home as England's most colourful bird. That is a notable difference between the Indian avifauna and ours: there are far more species of very brightly coloured birds here. Besides the Kingfisher there is not one other brightly coloured bird that is at all common. Such colourful birds as the Hoopoe, Bee-eater, Golden Oriole, and the Roller are only rare visitors, or at the best scarce annually occurring species.

Moving off from the water's edge we walked through small fields and amongst thick scrub. We had soon seen a fair variety of species: both the Bay- and Rufousbacked Shrikes, the former was already singing well. There were numerous small birds skulking about in the cover, and amongst those identified were Franklin's Wren Warbler and the Whitebacked Munia.

In the open country we saw several species of the type of bird that one invariably sees on the ground, moving about between the grass and stones and which usually present quite a problem to the uninitiated because as well as frequently vanishing from sight behind some object, they are nearly always very similarly plumaged, being a nondescript collection of brown and grey streaks and mottles. But notwithstanding these obstacles we managed to see two species of larks, and the more easily identified Blackbellied Finch-Lark.

In the trees of the thicker part of the cover, we picked out half a dozen or so species of small birds that quickly became members of unfortunate clan on my life-list. Amongst them were Flower-peckers of two species, two more wren-warblers, the beautiful Iora and some bulbuls. Unfortunately, I only managed to see the Redvented clearly, but a few days later I saw the Whitebrowed and Redwhiskered in the jungle around the lakes in the National Park.

A morning at the National Park was a great success. We saw an Osprey, some Blackwinged Stilts, a Greenshank, some Common Sandpipers, endless Little Cormorants, which were new to me, and several species of egret and heron.

In the jungle round the lake we saw over twenty species, among the more interesting ones new to me were the Tree Pie, Large Cuckoo-Shrike, Wood Shrike, and the fabulous Racket-tailed Drongo. My first meeting with this wonderful and exotic bird will certainly remain amongst the gallery of more significant experiences in my bird-watching life, in the company of such beautiful birds as the Avocet and such striking birds as our Eagle Owl.

But the editor's garden still had treats in store for me. There I saw two birds which for a visitor are most interesting, and they were the superb Paradise Flycatcher, which even though a female was wonderful to see, and the Crimsonbreasted Barbet sitting in a tree, singing its coppersmith's song.

The total of over 60 new species that I saw in less than a week round Bombay are a mere nothing in terms of the numbers of new

birds that I hope to see while at the migration camp at Bharatpur and in the far north, where I hope to go before returning to our drab, but nevertheless rewarding collection of European birds.

Jasper Newsome

THE CALLS OF YOUNG CUCKOOS

Young cuckoos of four different species were seen in New Forest, Dehra Dun, every summer. They were the Koel, the Common Hawk-Cuckoo, the Pied Crested Cuckoo, and the Indian Cuckoo. Crows were the fosterers for the first, and Jungle Babblers for the second and third. The calls of the fledgeling cuckoos, as they followed their foster parents, were a poor imitation of the calls of the latter. The calls were also similar to, but distinguishable from the calls of the legitimate young of the fosterers themselves.

The Black Drongo was the only bird seen fostering the Indian Cuckoo for several years. In 1960 and again in 1961 one young bird was seen fostered by Golden Orioles while two or three others were, as usual, fostered by Black Drongos. The call of the Drong-reared Indian Cuckoo was, as was to be expected, more or less the same as the call of young Drongos. But contrary to what might have been expected, the Oriole-reared Indian Cuckoos also called the same call as Drongo-reared Indian Cuckoos. The only noticeable difference was that the 'Oriole Indian Cuckoos' sounded more musical than 'Drongo Indian Cuckoos'. Their calls were not similar to the calls of either adult or young Orioles. Because there were young Orioles and both Drong- and Oriole-reared Indian Cuckoos not far from each other at the same time in New Forest, it was possible to go from one to another and compare the calls within a few minutes of each other. Nevertheless, I should like my observations to be confirmed by birdwatchers in Dehra Dun and other suitable places.

If I am not mistaken in my observations, they raise some interesting questions. Were the 'Oriole Indian Cuckoos' really the descendants of 'Drongo Indian Cuckoos' who laid their eggs in Orioles' nests because suitable nests of Drongos were not available? Do young Indian Cuckoos 'know' their fledgeling calls and do not have to learn from their foster parents? [Obviously all cuckoos 'know' their adult calls without being taught.] Are the calls of young birds influenced by the sounds around them, for instance their foster parents' calls? Are the Orioles not particular how 'their' young one called? How did they recognize the young Indian Cuckoo as 'theirs' even after it had left their nest? And so on.

Perhaps the answers are already known for some of these questions

Joseph George

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THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD IN RAJASTHAN DESERT

Some more information has been gathered regarding the occurrence of the godawan or the Great Indian Bustard, Choriotes nigriceps, in the desert area of south-western Rajasthan, between Jaisalmer and Barmer, since our last report on this bird in the October 1962 issue of the Newsletter.

During our survey, we were told about a century-old proverb, viz. godawan-ka-god (the repentance of the Great Indian Bustard) prevalent in the Pokaran-Jaisalmer area. The proverb owes its origin to the commonly held belief that extreme thirst in the hot summer months in the desert leads these birds to break open their own eggs, usually laid in May-June, and to drink the contents, only to repent later in the rainy season that with so much water all around, they had to destroy their own eggs for quenching thirst. Its deep, doleful hoonks during the monsoon rend the desert air and the villagers fondly take it as an expression of their self-pity. We have not got any evidence of the birds actually consuming their egg-contents, but the widespread popularity of the proverb makes one inclined to check the truth behind it, because if the proverb were found to be backed by facts then self-destruction of eggs might be the one single major factor in the great reduction of population of this species.

There has been some criticism (Newsletter 3(1):3-4) about our mentioning the names of localities where the godawans are seen in numbers on the plea that poachers are likely to take advantage of this information printed in the Newsletter. Educated shikaris who are likely to take advantage of the reports in the Newsletter are invariably conscious of the dwindling population of this bird and of the necessity to preserve as many of them as possible. Moreover, it is extremely difficult for anyone to search for this bird in the difficult terrain of the desert. It is the illiterate poachers who are a real menace to these birds. In any case, the information given by us would be superfluous for the illiterate poacher who is a keen naturalist and knows a good deal about the local fauna. What allures him to go for the godawan is the amount of meat he gets from the bird per shot he fires. Being a man of slender means, he would hesitate to try his gun powder and shots on a partridge, or a sandgrouse, or even on a hare. It nicely suits him to bag a chinkara, or a blackbuck, or a godawan with one shot of his muzzle-loader. Such illiterate poachers are plentiful in the desert and they roam about in their search for game, completely unmindful of the damage they are doing to the animal and bird wealth of our country by their indiscriminate shooting. It is not rare to come across a poacher in the heart of the desert who claims a bag of a score of godawans to his credit. It is our misfortune that our illiterate masses are completely unaware of the necessity of preserving at least our vanishing wildlife.

Ishwar Prakash, and
Pulak K. Ghosh

Special Animal Studies Division,
Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur

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EXTRAORDINARY COURTSHIP (?) OF THE HOUSE SPARROW

Noting in the February 1963 Newsletter for Birdwatchers -- your request for information on the House Sparrow -- I send you the following notes on unusual behaviour observed at Pine Orchard, Connecticut, April 22, 1962.

At 8 a.m. in a small tree just outside my house, I noted a female Passer d. domesticus, a common bird hereabouts, on a branchlet 10 feet above the ground, holding something quite large in her beak. I thought it was a mouse, but on looking more closely, saw that she held a male House Sparrow by one or two feathers of the crown of its head, the male dangling down quite limply. I thought the male was dead, and watched the almost motionless scene for over a minute. Some weak movements of the male were seen, and I thought it had been injured. For another full minute the birds remained thus, and my curiosity overcame my desire to wait out the performance. When I got about 6 feet away, the male suddenly 'came to life' and flew off, followed by the female.

By April 22, sparrows are commonly observed courting, and possibly this was a courtship performance, which by some unusual fluke developed into an unusual variation.

Dr. Wilbur G. Downs

10 Halstead Lane, Pine Orchard,
Conn., U.S.A.

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THE WRENECK, JYNX TORQUILLA

I am grateful to Mr. Reeves of Surrey for trying to throw some light on the racial differences of Jynx torquilla mentioned in my article of the same name.

Jynx torquilla himalayana is mentioned in Ripley's A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN in the Addenda as '797a. Jynx torquilla himalayana Vaurie (1959, Amer. Mus. Novit. No. No. 1963:9). (Indus-Wardwan Valley, Kashmir.). Range: Breeds in W. Pakistan and India from Murram Valley (?) to Chitral, Gilgit and Kashmir; Indochina (rare).'

My young friend Julian Donahue has just sent me a copy of Vaurie's original paper mentioned above in which he describes all the seven subspecies of Jynx torquilla together with photographs. I realised that the points of difference which appeared significant were really unimportant.

I am quoting Vaurie for his description. of Jynx torquilla himalayana a new subspecies.

'Diagnoses: Differs from all other races of the species by being more vermiculated, rather than spotted on the lower breast, abdomen and flanks. The markings are broader, less sagittate in shape, and tend to coalesce with the result that the abdomen appears to be barred rather than spotted.

'Measurements: Wing length - adult males 81 (type), 82, 84, 86. Adult females, 80, 83.

'Discussion - 'himalayana' resembles 'chinensis' in coloration above, being grayish as in the latter, less rufous than 'japonica' but is somewhat more boldly marked with black on the nape, back, scapulars and inner secondaries than 'chinensis'. The

ground colour of the under parts averages slightly darker than in 'japonica' and is more uniform than in the latter or in the other races, showing less contrast between the color of the throat and that of the abdomen.'

Julian, who collected a specimen in Delhi, should be able to say if it belonged to this subspecies.

Incidentally, I may correct a statement in that article. I claimed that 17th April was the latest date for Jynx torquilla in Delhi. I found later that Sir N.F. Frome had seen one on 23rd April. His earliest date for it was 8th August (N.F. Frome, Birds of Delhi and District, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 47(2), December 1947.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

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THE BIRDS OF RATNAGIRI DISTRICT, MAHARASHTRA

Ratnagiri District is a hilly country lying between Bombay and Goa on the west coast of India, with a heavy rainfall. To its east stand the Western Ghats, and the Arabian Sea is its western boundary. The Arabian Sea has many tidal creeks intercepting this District at many points forming a network of waterways. The forest of this District is of a semi-evergreen type with scrub jungles on the open tops of the rocky hills, interspersed by villages and cultivated fields at many places. Betel and coconut palms, jak fruit trees, mango orchards, cashew trees, etc. are the main plantations. 'Ain' (Terminalia tomentosa), 'Kinjal' (T. paniculata), 'Khair' (Acacia catechu), 'Kuda' (Holarrhena antidysenterica), 'Kajra' (Strychnos nuxvomica), 'Karvanda' (Carissa carandas), etc. are the naturally growing trees and shrubs in the jungles, while the sides of the creeks are covered with mangrove patches. The geographical situation, the natural vegetation, and plantations make this District attractive for birds of many types.

During my 12 days' stay in the area I could see as many as 130 species of birds within a radius of 15 miles. They are listed below with their common English and Marathi names, together with their status wherever possible.

Corvus splendens: House Crow. Mar. son káwlá. Common in and around villages

Corvus macrorhynceus: Jungle Crow. Mar. dom káwlá. Status as above.

Dendrocitta vagabunda: Tree Pie. Mar. ? . Pairs in betel and coconut plantations, and mango orchards.

Parus xanthogenys: Yellowcheeked Tit. Often seen near jungles and houses.

Turdoides striatus: Jungle Babbler. Mar. chambar. Common all over in flocks of 5 to 30.

Dumetia hyperithra: Rufousbellied Babbler. Occasionally seen in flocks of 5 to 10 in jungles only.

Aegithinia tiphia: Indian Iora. Mar. shil pakhrú. Common all over, jumping from branch to branch collecting insects.

Chloropsis aurifrons: Goldfronted Chloropsis. Common on the flowering trees feeding on insects too

Pycnonotus cafer: Redvented Bulbul. Mar. kálá bolándá. Common throughout the area

Pycnonotus jocosus: Redwhiskered Bulbul. Mar. Bolándá. As above.

- Pycnonotus luteolus: Whitebrowed Bulbul. Seen twice near the village.
- Phoenicurus ochruros: Redstart. Winter visitor; seen once.
- Saxicoloides fulicata: Indian Robin. Very common on hills; mostly in pairs
- Copsychus saularis: Magpie Robin. Very common all over; always in pairs
- Erithacus svecicus: Bluethroat. Common in mangrove patches
- Turdus merula: Blackbird. Common in the orchards; very tame
- Zoothora citrina: Whitethroated Ground Thrush. Common in shady orchards; 3 to 5 per orchard
- Monticola solitaria: Blue Rock Thrush. Seen once by the side of ~~the freshwater stream~~ of the seashore.
- Myiophonus horsfieldi: Malabar Whistling Thrush. Seen once by the side of a freshwater stream.
- Muscicapa tickelliae: Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. Very common in the shady places and heard commonly amongst bushes.
- Terpsiphone paradisi: Paradise Flycatcher: Commoner than House Sparrow around houses. Both phases seen together.
- Muscicapa parva: Redbreasted Flycatcher. Seen often but isolated.
- Monarcha azurea: Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher. Common in the jungle but isolated in this season.
- Rhipidura albogularis: Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher: Mar. nhavi (meaning barbar) known so for its chap-chap call. Common all over in thick bushes and mangroves.
- Lanius vitatus: Baybacked Shrike. Common but lesser than schach.
- Lanius collurio: Redbacked Shrike. Seen only one tailless individual in a bamboo clump.
- Lanius schach: Rufousbacked Shrike. Common in the open country or harvested fields sitting on a stump
- Tephrodornis pondicerianus: Common Wood Shrike. Met often in the high mango trees or jak fruit trees
- Pericrocotus flammeus: Scarlet Minivet. Met often but lesser than cinnamomeus
- Pericrocotus cinnamomeus: Large Cuckoo Shrike. Mar. rani pakhru. Common all over in a flock of five to eight.
- Coracina novaehollandiae: Large Cuckoo Shrike. Visitor moving isolated; seen and heard many times near the villages and jungles.
- Dicrurus adsimilis: King Crow or Black Drongo. Mar. govind. Common and the only drongo seen in the area.
- Orthotomus sutorius: Tailor Bird. Mar. shimpi pakshi. Common like all over the other parts
- Prinia gracilis: Franklin's Wren Warbler. Only Wren Warbler seen commonly in the open fields and jungles.
- Oriolus oriolus: Golden Oriole. Mar. haldya. Rare to find; seen only thrice.
- Oriolus xanthornus: Blackheaded Oriole. Mar. káládok haldya. Very common all over the area.
- Acridotheres fuscus: Jungle Myna. Mar. sálunki. As common as common myna in the city, the only myna seen in the area.
- Ploceus philippinus: Common Weaver Bird. Mar. sugrin. Seen in flocks in winter plumage, nests on coconut palms are common sight.
- Lonchura striata: Whitebacked Munia. Mar. káli chimni. Commonly seen in flocks of five to ten; found feeding on ground near houses.
- Petronia xanthocollis: Yellowthroated Sparrow. Restricted to areas in flocks of 5 to 10. (House Sparrow not met.)
- Hirundo daurica: Redrumped Swallow. Common near water and on the creeks
- Hirundo smithi: Wiretailed Swallow. Same as above

Motacilla caspica: Grey Wagtail. Mar. Dhobi. Isolated birds on open grounds and in the harvested fields near water or in the summer crop fields.

Motacilla citreola: Yellowheaded Wagtail. Mar. dhobi. Common in the summer crop fields.

Motacilla alba: White Wagtail. Mar. dhobi. Single birds seen near water and in open patches near water.

Anthus campestris: Tawny Pipit. Common on the rocky open tops of the hills.

Galerida malabarica: Malabar Crested Lark. Mar. bhátuk. Very common in the open country along with pipits.

Ammodramus phoenicurus: Rufoustailed Finch Lark. ~~Mar. kálá bhátuk~~
Seen occasionally by the seaside and on the dusty roads.

Eremopterix grisea: Blackbellied Finch Lark. Mar. kálá bhátuk. Common on the sea shores and in the open country, or in harvested fields.

Noctarinia asiatica: Purple Sunbird. Mar. madh pakshi. Occasionally seen on drumstick, and cashew trees which were in flower.

Nectarinia seylanica: Purplorumped Sunbird. Mar. madh pakhu. The most common sunbird of the area often seen on flowering trees.

Nectarinia lotenia: Loten's Sunbird. Mar. same as above. Often seen feeding on spiders and flying insects, as well as on nectar.

Dicaeum erythrorhynchos: Tickell's Flowerpecker. Very common bird on the mango trees feeding on the nectar and berries of Loranthus.

Dicaeum agile: Thickbilled Flowerpecker. Common on fig trees feeding on the smaller berries, and insects, in it.

Dendrocopos mahrattensis: Mahrata Woodpecker. Mar. sutár. Common in mango orchards and bamboo clumps.

Dinopium bharukalensis: Golden Woodpecker. Mar. soneri sutár. Common on coconut palms having holes in series on a tree.

Micropternus brachyurus: Rufous Woodpecker. Mar. kharba sutár. As common as the Mahrata Woodpecker in the jungles, plantations, and near the villages too. Very tame to observe at a few feet distance.

Megalaima haemacephala: Coppersmith. Mar. támbat. Very common on the fig, banyan, pipul or such fruiting trees, along with the following, in company with Koels.

Megalaima zeylonica: Large Green Barbet. Mar. cuckda. Very common in the company of all ~~mentioned~~ mentioned in the preceding species.

Eudynamys scolopacea: Koel. Mar. kokil. As like the barbets in a pair or two at a time in a tree. One young one being fed by House Crows was also seen.

- Centropus sinensis: Crow-Pheasant. Mar. tupia, or bharadwaj. Commonly seen in a pair in the bushes but not more than two pairs in the area.
- Psittacula krameri: Roseringed Parakeet. Mar. popat. Common on fruiting trees, in flocks of four to ten.
- Psittacula cyanocephala: Blossomheaded Parakeet. Mar. kartá popat. Status same as above.
- Loriculus vernalis: Lorikeet. More common than the two preceding species. Seen everywhere.
- Coracias benghalensis: Roller, or Blue Jay. One seen often at the same place on a dry tree amongst the harvested fields. Not seen anywhere else.
- Merops orientalis: Common Green Bee-eater. Mar. páchuk. Common all over the country in open or jungles. In open on rocks suddenly rising for insects and on the tops of trees in the jungles or mangroves.
- Ceryle rudis: Pied Kingfisher. Mar. pándhrá dichá. Occasionally seen on the creeks.
- Alcedo atthis: Common Kingfisher. Mar. dichá. The commonest kingfisher of the area near water; one occasion seen it catch a Skipper Frog and bang it on the stone on which it was sitting till it was dead, then swallowed it head first.
- Ramphalcyon capensis: Brownheaded Storkbilled Kingfisher. Seen occasionally by the side of water but not very common.
- Halcyon smyrnensis: Whitebreasted Kingfisher. Mar. lál dichá. Very common but wherever seen was away from water.
- Halcyon pileata: Blackcapped Kingfisher. Not very common but seen many times on the mangrove stumps by the side of the creeks.
- Sauropatis chloris: Whitecollared Kingfisher. Seen only twice on the open sea shore; very fast flier.
- Anthracoceros coronatus: Malabar Pied Hornbill. Mar. garud. Very common in flocks of five to fifteen. Feeding on fruits of banyan, pipul, and Nux-vomica.
- Upupa epops: Hoopoe. Common in the open country in flocks of 4 to 9.
- Hemiprocne coronata: Crested Swift. Seen only once, a pair in flight.
- Caprimulgus indicus: Indian Jungle Nightjar. Very common on the open tops of the rocky hills at night. Calling the peculiar call chuk-chuk-chuk-chekur-rr-rr-rr in the evenings.
- Glaucidium radiatum: Jungle Owlet. Mar. ghubad. Very commonly found in pairs, heard during the day as well as at night.
- Ninox scutulata: Brown Hawk Owl. Seen only once; nothing more known.
- Sarcogyps calvus: King Vulture. Mar. kala gidhád. Occasionally found with the other species.

Gyps indicus: Longbilled Vulture. Mar. gidhad. Common with the next feeding together.

Pseudogyps benghalensis: Whitebacked Vulture. Mar. Same as above. Common in the company of the preceding species.

Neophron perenopterus: Scavenger Vulture. Mar. pándhri ghár. Seen many times but only on the seaside; not seen on the creeks.

Falco chiequera: Redheaded Merlin. Very common in the area. The Common Drongo very commonly immitates its call.

Falco tinnunculus: Kestrel. Only once seen in the area, perched on a bamboo.

Aquila rapax: Tawny Eagle. A doubtful record, seen once at a distance.

Spizaetus cirrhatus: Crested Hawk Eagle. Mar. kural. Occasionally seen near the village; well known to the people as lifter of their fowls.

Spilornis cheela: Crested Serpent Eagle. Commonly met with in the thicker parts of the jungle.

Butastur teesa: White-eyed Buzzard. Only once seen in the open country.

Haliaeetus leucogaster: Whitebellied Sea Eagle. Commonly met with on the creeks and on the sea shores.

Haliaeetus indus: Brahminy Kite. The most common kite of the area. Found on nest at one place on a tall mangrove tree.

Milvus migrans lineatus: Large Indian Kite. Mar. ghár. More commoner than the next; fishing near water.

Milvus migrans govinda: Common Pariah Kite. Mar. ghár. Not so common as in the cities like Bombay.

Circus macrorus: Pale Harrier. See occasionally in the open country.

Astur badius: Shikra. Common like the Merlin, heard many times, and found in pairs in this season.

Croceopus phoenicopterus: The Southern Green Pigeon. Mar. pusáwá. Met with occasionally on banyan or fig trees which were in fruit.

Chalcophaps indica: Emerald Dove. Mar. bhil-kavda. Commonly met with in the jungles. Found feeding on the ground many times.

Columba livia: Blue Rock Pigeon. Mar. parva. In flocks but very alert when on the ground; rarely seen near the villages.

Streptopelia orientalis: Rufous Turtle Dove. Mar. ghati kavda. Rare in the area; seen only once.

Streptopelia chinensis: Spotted Dove. Mar. kavda. Very common in the area, flocks of five to ten feeding in the harvested paddy fields.

Pavo cristatus: Common Peafowl. Mar. o Mor and Lador or. Common in the thickets in flocks of five to ten maximum. Very wary in behaviour.

Gallus spadicea: Red Spurfowl. Mar. ran kombadi. Common in the thickets and ravines; not so wary as the peafowl.

Perdula asiatica: Jungle Bush-Quail. Mar. lavi. Common in flocks varying from 8-10 to 20. One big flock with 12 chicks of two broods together were seen.

Francolinus pictus: Painted Partridge. Heard only once.

Amaurornis phoenicurus: Whitebreasted Waterhen. Mar. kuwakarin. Common near water streams and in the mangrove patches.

Fulica atra: Coot. Mar. kamla. Two passing migrants stayed only two days in the area in the creek.

Cursorius coromandelicus: Cream-coloured Courser. Occasionally seen in flocks of three to five all standing still and straight on the leg more over in a line, in the open country.

Glaucola maldivarum: Indian Large Swallow Plover. Seen in flocks flying on the creeks.

Larus ichthyæus: Great Blackheaded Gull. Doubtful sight record.

Larus ridibundus: Blackheaded Gull. Very common near fishing boats.

Larus brunicephalus: Brownheaded Gull. Occasionally seen mixed in the flocks of the preceding species.

Leucopoliis alexandrinus: Kentish Plover. Very very common on the rocks on the shores. In big flocks of ten to hundred.

Charadrius dubius jerdoni: Jerdon's Ringed Plover. Very common on open grass patches and near the shore on sandy beaches.

Pluvialis apricarius: Golden Plover. Very common on the marshy patches after the tides are over.

Lobivanellus indicus: Redwattled Lapwing. Mar. titvi. Common as everywhere.

Himantopus himantopus: Blackwinged Stilt. Met occasionally with Greenshanks by the side of the creeks in low water.

Numenius arquata: Curlew. Met occasionally in the company of Intermediate Egrets and Green Bitterns, feeding in the marshy patches.

Limosa limosa limosa: Blacktailed Godwit. Mar. tiwla -- this name is commonly used for all waders including sandpipers and stint, and Red- and Green Shank. Occasionally seen singly or in pairs along with sandpipers.

Tringa ochropus: Green Sandpiper. Commonly met all over the creeks flying suddenly with a call.

Tringa stagnatilis: Marsh Sandpiper. Rare in the area; seen 2 flocks in the mud.

Tringa hypoleucos: Common Sandpiper. Common as its name suggests.

Tringa totanus: Redshank. Only one in the area was moving for many days.

Glottis nebularia: Greenshank. Commoner than Redshank; in flocks of 5 to 10.

Erolia minuta: Little Stint. Common flocks of five to 30-40 along the creeks.

Capella gallinago: Common Fantail Snipe. Mar. isnipe. Common in the marshes.

Phalacrocorax niger: Little Cormorant. Mar. pán-kávlá. Common in the creek waters.

Anhinga melanogaster: Darter. Only one seen many times in the area.

Egretta intermedia: Smaller Egret. Mar. balái. Isolated birds in the fields flying away on human approach with a call.

Egretta garzetta: Little Egret. Mar. baglá. Common flocks by the side of water or in the fields mixed in the company of cattle and smaller egrets.

Bubulcus ibis: Cattle Egret. Mar. Same as above. Common as mentioned above.

Demiegretta asha: Reef Heron. Mar. kala dhok. Commonly seen at water but only single birds.

Ardeola grayii: Pond Heron. Mar. jakitwala. Common everywhere.

Butorides striatus: Green Heron. Resting in the mangrove patches during day time and active by dusk.

These observations were made from 7th to 19th January, this year. This note will testify to the uniqueness of the district for birdwatchers.

P.W. Soman

Bombay Natural History Society

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BIRD NOTES FROM SAURASHTRA

The aftermaths of a very lean monsoon are influencing us. Water is rather low and most of our lakes and other water supplies are dwindling. It is quite hot too and there appears to be signs of an early summer.

The birds are proclaiming summer's advent, and the loud chirrup of the Tailorbird is heard more and more frequently. The little Coppersmith is really quite vociferous, and quite a few birds are tonking away in the trees in the compound.

Sparrows have started collecting grass and exploring cavities and cornices under the eaves. However, this is all still in the exploratory stage. Whitethroated Munias seem to have no fixed time for breeding for there is a pair already at it in a thick clump of bougainville.

All the resident birds, however are not as optimistic as the barbets and the sparrows, and the Koel is very subdued, while the Redvented Bulbuls seem to be quite furtive in their ways.

Purple Sunbirds are of course very gay and are carolling everywhere, but then this is their normal breeding season and in a month or so they will be raising their last broods of the year. How wonderfully they synchronise their breeding with the flowering of most of our trees in this dry part of the country, for March and April deck the trees with blooms and make them the festive places for insects.

Talking of flowering trees, the Red Silk Cotton is in flower, and its blossom covered branches are the favourite haunt of Sunbirds, Common Mynas, and squirrels. Goats feast on the fallen blooms. The drumstick trees are also about to flush into inflorescence, and then they will be alive with Sunbirds after spiders and other insects and droning bumble bees.

Green Bee-eaters are still in flocks, and we have a tall tree in which a small flock comes to roost. It is interesting to note how they all huddle onto the outer thin branches just at sundown, and sleep closely packed side by side along a twig facing the opposite side of the tree, from which side, incidently, the prevailing wind also blows -- NE. wind.

No Rosy Pastors have come to town, though they are around in small scattered flocks in the countryside, but then the Ficus are not fruiting. We shall soon have the revellers among us though.

The Peacocks have started growing new trains, but they still look leggy and very unprepossessing. What a pity they shed their trains for many months of the year. They do not appear more proud because of the recognition by the nation.

The crows have started to be amourosly inclined, and they are really most attentive and delicate in their advances, something not to be seen in the love life of many a more attractive bird.

K.S. Lavkumar

Rajkot, February 10, 1963

REVIEW

THE CRY OF A BIRD. By Dorothy Yglesias. William Kimber. Price 25 sh.

This book is the story of the Wild Bird Hospital started by the authoress and her sister in the village of Mousehole in Cornwall more than thirty years ago. The sisters began their

venture, which has now become something of a national institution, without special funds or knowledge of bird life and with only the amateur assistance of the local villagers, but of the 4000 injured birds which passed through their hands most were apparently successfully returned to conditions of wild life.

Miss Yglesias does not claim to be a trained ornithologist and is modest about the conclusions which she draws from her wide experience. Her fascinating story does however suggest that wild birds may have greater individuality and richer emotional life than it is at present fashionable to admit. As a record of sympathetic understanding between human beings and birds it must be almost unique.

H.M. Wake

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Studying the House Sparrow

Our project for studying the life history of House Sparrows (Newsletter, February 1963) is we hope being taken seriously by our readers. If we cannot collect all the vital statistics for this bird before the end of the year it will reflect poorly on our capacity to observe purposefully -- for sparrows are everywhere and are not particularly secretive.

So far only two notes have come in, one published in this issue and another by Sumedha Salakanta (aged 9) who complained that a part of her knitting wool was used by a sparrow as nesting material.

Movements of Rosy Pastors

Rosy Pastors, which come annually to the western suburbs of Bombay about the middle of January, as soon as the Erythrina and bombax trees start to flower, have now completely disappeared from here. They are still seen further inland where there is more diversity of food. Most of these birds must now be contemplating the return journey to their homelands. Will readers look up their note books and send their reports about the dates and place where they have seen these birds? We would like to collate the data that has been recorded so far.

Field Identification of Birds

Requests come in occasionally from readers asking for help in identifying birds which they have seen. To track down a species from a description given by somebody else is not at all easy. Those who have sent requests of this nature -- and indeed all of us -- will profit by reading again the excellent note by H. G. Alexander reproduced in Newsletter Vol. 1, December 1960.

A competent psychologist says that half of any new matter presented is forgotten after the first half hour, two thirds after nine hours, three fourths after six days and four fifths after a month. The importance of taking down notes on the spot or within a few minutes of observation is therefore quite essential.

National Bird

The Peacock has been designated our National Bird. There is little point now in continuing the controversy but as a matter of interest readers might refer to an earlier issue of the Newsletter where a case was made for the selection of the Great

Indian Bustard for this honour. Anyway, the peafowl will multiply and strut even more arrogantly than they do now, while the Bustard is quietly extinguished from the face of the earth.

The Crow:

CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Mohd Ishaq Siddiqi of Lucknow has sent this extract: 'It is firmly believed, and there is more ground for the belief than usual, that crows hold punchayats, caste-councils or committees, and inflict summary punishments on offenders. It is at least certain that in India, as elsewhere, a maimed or disabled bird, unable to escape or hide himself, is set upon by his kind and killed. This habit is reported to have suggested a strategem by which omnivorous gypsy folk catch crows. A live crow is spread-eagled on his back, with forked pegs holding down his pinions. He flutters and cries and other crows come to investigate his case and presently attack him. With claws and beak he seizes an assailant and holds him fast. The gypsy steps from hiding, and secures and pinions the second crow. These two catch two more, the four catch four more, and so on, until there are enough for dinner, or to take into a town, where the crow catcher stands before some respectable Hindu's shop and threatens to kill the bird he holds in his hand. The Hindu pays a ransom of a pice or two and the crow is released.' -- John Lockwood Kipling in BEAST AND MAN IN INDIA (London 1904) pp. 28-29.

[Perhaps some reader may be in a position to try out this method or to tell us whether it is still in vogue in any part of the country and as successful as the account leads one to believe. On the face of it it would seem that the crow is far too cunning a bird to be taken in by this simple device. He may try it once, but that other crows seeing the predicament of the victim should allow themselves to be taken in in the same way seems difficult to believe. -- Ed.]

Abstracts section in the Newsletter

As regards the Abstracts Section to be opened in the Newsletter I think it has to be a cooperative effort. First of all, we have to find out who gets the various journals on birds. Next we have to find out whether they can devote the necessary time to abstract interesting articles for publication in the Newsletter. Even if all the journals were available here, I couldn't do the abstracting of all the articles. It will be too much work! Too much for the time at my disposal, I mean! At present I am getting only one journal, the Audubon Magazine, which contains articles on birds. I can take up the responsibility for abstracting papers from this. The Avian Biology Department of the Baroda University should be able to do much in this task, I should imagine. There is no better way of studying a paper than by preparing an abstract of it.

Joseph George, Roorkee

[Any offers? - Ed.]

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Reminder

Readers are requested to send in their subscriptions by check, bank draft, or money order to the above address.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 May



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 3, No. 5

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CRIMSONBREASTED BARBET AND LARGE GREEN
BARBET CASUALTIES

At Cochin in March 1959, I was a helpless witness to a double tragedy involving two Crimsonbreasted Barbets (Megalaima haem-
-cephala) which I quote here as a sombre opening for another which came to notice recently. As all my Cochin notes have been lost, I must rely on a somewhat rickety memory for details -- but the general picture is fairly straightforward.

On this day at approximately 1700 as I was standing outside my office overlooking the Cochin airfield, my attention was drawn to a pair of Crimsonbreasted Barbet which took off in quick succession from a drumstick tree in the office compound and flew directly westwards towards a whitewashed brick structure about 50 yards away. The hut stood solitary on the grass shoulders flanking the runways. The height of flight was about 20 feet from the ground. It was a clear cloudless afternoon; the sun still high in the west.

My initial interest in the flight was casual though I was somewhat intrigued by its direction as there was no tree nearer than 400 yards distance on the western perimeter of the airfield.

I was, however, given little time for idle speculation as both birds, maintaining direction and height crashed into the east side of the hut and were found dead when I arrived at the spot a few seconds later. Both birds had hit the side with their bills and were bleeding from the mouth.

Now we come to a more recent episode in Delhi involving the Large Green Barbet (Megalaima zeylonicus) two of which are permanently resident in the garden. The bird involved, however, was a casual visitor. The house faces east-west and is, externally, washed a light cream.

The garden has fairly extensive lawns, dotted with large shady trees some of them quite close to the house.

On 16th March 1963, strolling round the house, I came across a Large Green Barbet lying dead on the ground at the base of the east side -- bleeding from the mouth. The time then was 1805 (sunset 1828) and the body was still warm. On examining the bird I discovered the tip of its bill covered with a white chalky substance and the Cochin episode sprang to mind. On a careful examination of that portion of the wall I discovered an obviously fresh cavity (about 1/8th inch) in the plaster a 10 feet up and 9 inches from the right hand corner of the building, exactly above the dead bird. It was then not too difficult to reconstruct the tragedy.

There is a medium-sized tree directly to the east and 50 feet distant from the right hand corner of the house which is frequently used by these birds. There is another neem tree half way along the north side of the house with its branches overhanging the flat-roof. It is just possible that the bird had left the first tree to reach the overhanging branches of the neem (directly in its line of flight) but had misjudged either height or direction and come to a violent end.

Is there a relation between the Cochin and Delhi episodes; is it a pure coincidence that both involved birds belonging to the same genus? Has anyone a similar experience to report?

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

A JUNGLE CROW'S MYSTERIOUS BEHAVIOUR

Instances of song-birds and others which maintain 'territories' attacking their reflections in polished surfaces are well known. But, apart from one instance where a Jackdaw attacked a picture of a bird of its own species in a book, I have not come across any report implying such a proclivity in the crow family. I wish to make it clear at the outset that the behaviour here reported did not suggest that the bird was attacking its own image in the glass.

I took up residence in a house at Ernakulam on 29 November 1962. We had hardly begun exploring the new house when my wife noticed the strange behaviour of a Jungle Crow and drew my attention to it. The crow was clinging to a window with glass panes and

pecking at the glass. This was at about 8 a.m. Thereafter, till the 21st of December, the crow used to visit the same spot at the window at least once every day. On most days it came 3 or 4 times. It did not appear to be following a strict time table, but its visits were usually round about 7.30, 11, 15.30, and 16.30 hrs. On some days it came at 7, 9, 10, 12, and 17 hrs. Every time it came, it went through a very curious routine.

toe/ The routine was as follows. The crow used to appear suddenly at the window, cling to one particular wooden cross-piece and at once begin tapping on the glass-pane. Its bill was always directed straight at the glass so that only the tip of the upper mandible made contact with the glass. After tapping 4 or 5 times vigorously (it was always this resounding noise that announced the arrival of the crow), the bird would 'bite' the middle/ of its right foot near the ankle with the very tip of its bill and tumble headlong to the ground! The crow's foot-hold on the window was always precarious, and the whole routine had the sound of threshing wings as its accompaniment.

On dropping to the ground, the crow presumably spent a few seconds digging its bill into the dust, and then flew up to the top of a wall some $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet away from the window. Quite often it used to return to the window from the wall and run through the whole performance again. When perched on the wall it often called raucously for a while.

The cross-bar to which the crow clung was $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the ground. What the crow did on reaching the ground was not observed. But the scratches and pits left in the dust, as well as the coating of dust on its upper mandible when it flew up to the wall, suggested that it dug its bill in the dust and rubbed the tip of the bill on the ground.

From the 22nd to the 25th of December the crow was not noticed at the window. On the 26th it came at 9 a.m. and I watched it very closely, standing only a foot or two away from the glass-pane. This time, after vigorously tapping the pane half-a-dozen times, the crow gripped the right foot at the ankle, gripping all the toes at once, and fell to the ground. In a few seconds it was back at the cross-piece, tapping. This time it bit the middle toe of the right foot, released it on losing its foot-hold, regained the perch, and, then bit the middle toe of the left foot, only to release it at once and take hold of the usual middle toe of the right foot. Gripping this, it fluttered to the ground, flew up to the wall, cawed a number of times, and flew off. It came again at 15 hrs., but the presence of children near the wall prevented it from approaching the window.

After the 26th the crow appeared to have released itself from the spell of the window, for it never came again.

On 5 or 6 occasions I was able to watch the antics of the crow at close quarters from within the room. Either the crow could not see me (the room was rather gloomy), or was so pre-occupied with its routine that it did not notice my presence. As I had a suspicion that there was something wrong with the middle toe of its right foot, I looked for signs of injury or evidence of some kind of dermatitis. But, as far as I could see, the toe was quite normal.

At first I thought that the crow was attracted by its reflection in the glass, and that the 'toe-biting' was some kind of 'displacement activity' (resulting from its failure to get at the other bird). But I found that the glass was dirty and dull and would not give a good 'image' at all.

The window faces the west. There are 4 panes in all. But the crow used only one of these -- the upper pane on the northern side. The top of the wall was level with the top panes of the window.

I may also mention that the crow was always alone, and appeared to be an adult in good health. But once, and once alone, another Jungle Crow was seen with it on the wall. And the stranger fed this one!

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan,
Ernakulam, Kerala

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A BIRDWATCHING OUTING IN RAJKOT

A group of us, mostly representing the amateur birdwatchers of Rajkot, went to the Lalpuri Reservoir some three miles from Rajkot City, on a hot Sunday afternoon on 31 March 1963.

The lake was sadly depleted of its water, but this had exposed great expanses of weeds and squelchy mud, rich in organic deposits. In this bonanza of fish, frog and crustacea had gathered a great convention of avian gourmets to endow this normally uninteresting lake with great possibilities for field observation of water-side birds of the area, both resident and migratory.

The sun was high and harsh, but a cooling breeze from the sea made it surprisingly pleasant to be out, even for the American member of our party. From the dam, we were able to gain a panoramic survey of the variety of birds in and around the water in the basin. On the water was a small bunch of Coots, and swimming with them were several pairs of Bluewinged Teal, the drakes being conspicuous for the broad, white supercilium. This duck seems to be fairly common this time of the year, and, when flying, the characteristic pigeon-grey shoulder patches in both the sexes differentiate it from the other small-sized duck found side by side with the Common Teal of which we observed one example, also dabbling in the shallows.

A long tongue of mud and rocks extended into the vegetation-choked water upon which drowsed a mass of Black Ibis, Spotbill Ducks, a few Grey Herons, and a couple of Openbilled Storks. Resting on the rock piles with long serpentine necks were some Snake Birds. Around their feet sat the Little Cormorants. A Blacknecked Stork towered disdainfully over the lesser fry, and packed around his red legs were somnolent Spoonbills. The whole concourse, however, would have been a trifle boring to watch if it snoozed were it not for the moving frieze of flamingos feeding meticulously in small groups around the lake. There were about forty of them in all, and a few were in full adult plumage with bright pink on the coverts, pink bills and legs. Now and then a solitary bird would rise and, on rose-tinted wings fly across the lake making a lovely picture against the blue sky. In flight, the flamingo is a wreath of white and rose, its grotesqueness lost in the sinuous grace of its long neck. The shortness of the wings, beating the air vigorously light up with colours for which the flamingo is so famous. While flying, as well as in the water feeding, walking, or resting, the improbable form of the flamingo strangely attains a grace which ~~is~~ is difficult to explain.

There was a rather large flock of Little Ringed Plovers. So many, in fact, that they were carefully appraised for being

possible Ringed Plovers. However, all of them had a white band above the black one across the forehead, and they did not show any wing bar when flying. It is certain, however, that many of the individual birds were of the migratory form, possibly others represented local migrants forced to aggregate here by the drying up of their places of water. There were no Sand Plovers which are normally present at this time of the year. We had hoped to see a couple in their bright summer dress. The Temminck's Stints and the Little Stints were insignificantly attired, which was a disappointment, though a solitary Blacktailed Godwit had flushed chestnut, and it was a pity there were no other specimens in winter colours for comparison. Sandpipers were also not plentiful, and the Green- and Common Sandpipers were conspicuously absent. The few Spotted Sandpipers were distinctly plumed, and a Marsh Sandpiper conveniently fed around a Greenshank in repose, providing a good contrast in the sizes. A scattering of Ruff and Reeves probed in the slush but seemed jittery at being approached.

Across the water, and out of effective range of the field glasses were a number of Avocets and a very large convocation of Openbill-ed Storks.

It was quite obvious that most of the fish population had been consumed as there were only a few Lesser Egrets and no Great Egrets, Painted Storks, White Ibis, or River Terns, all of which congregate when fish face despair.

We were pleased to see a dozen or so Demoiselle Crane casually passing the heat of the day among the other birds. It is not a usual experience as these sorely hunted birds are understandably wary and are commonly seen flying high overhead in excited chase, or feeding in open fields, tense at the proximity of human beings. They were so graceful that we held our glasses on them for a long time.

Finally, after watching a small flock of Common Swallows, and Dusky Crag Martins, we dispersed, well content with the afternoon.

K.S. Lavkumar & William C. Selover

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FLIGHT SAFETY : AN ARTICLE FROM AIR CLUES DATED MARCH 1962

Flt. Sgt. C.J. Bridgman (M. B. O. U.)
(A Reproduction)

The bird is in the wing

The bird strike problem is widely known but there is another aspect of bird operations which is, at best, a nuisance and, at worst, a hazard to aircraft. This is the tendency for birds to build nests in aircraft and to drop nesting material into aircraft undergoing servicing.

Flight Sergeant Bridgman is a keen ornithologist and has made a study of this problem during his Service career. In this article he has produced some interesting and pertinent facts about bird nesting habits and their possible effects on aircraft.

There are, up to the time of writing, no recorded cases of an accident being caused by a bird's nest in an aircraft. This happy record is no doubt due to a high standard of servicing with, perhaps, a dash of good fortune to help, but this record could easily be spoilt during the nesting season which is just starting.

To leave you in no doubt that the problem can be a serious one I would quote the example of a bird's nest built in a Beverly fin. The droppings of the birds at their nest were the cause of corrosion in the skin of the fin.

Why do they?

Man in his progress is gradually destroying the habitats and nesting sites of birds, as originally supplied by nature. Birds, under the same law of evolution that compells man to progress, must progress with him for their species to survive.

They must, therefore, take advantage of human endeavours and it is quite likely that some of the sites manufactured by man, albeit unwittingly, are better suited to the bird's purpose than the original ones that have been destroyed.

Some recorded examples.

In 1946, when Tempests were being assembled at Karachi for use in the Far East, birds' nests were found in varying stages of assembly and use. They often contained eggs and in some cases even young birds before they were discovered.

Subsequently, nests have been discovered at the time of building, with eggs in them, with young in them, and long after the birds have finished with them when an aircraft was on a minor servicing. Naturally the further the nesting cycle has progressed, the greater the danger, since there is an increasing lapse of time in which the nest, if in a vital position, could be the cause of an accident.

Building sites for nests have been within engine cowlings, propeller spinners, mainplanes, fins and flying control surfaces, and although entry has often been made where access panels have been removed it is more frequently gained through apertures that are normally open in the aircraft structure. Lightening holes which are exposed when a flying control is away from the neutral position, holes where control rods enter or leave a surface, air intakes and gill openings are typical examples of ways of access which are always available to the birds.

Birds normally select ingress holes that are just big enough to allow them easy entry from flight but at the same time prevent the entry of larger species; birds themselves can usually cope with smaller birds. The entry must open into a cavity large enough to allow a nest to be built but it is surprising how small some of the holes can be and still suit the bird's requirements.

Favourite sites.

The size of entry available is probably the reason why certain species appear to have favourite sites on different types of aircraft. The house sparrow, for instance, will build in the fin of a Hastings; this has been noted five times, the bird entering alongside the top hinge attachment of the rudder. The aileron control rod of the Pembroke leaves the mainplane through a hole which has been used on at least three occasions. Two of these cases occurred in the same aircraft, one in each mainplane, and were discovered only by the young calling while the old bird, with food, perched on the control rod against the entry hole. The young birds dispersed into the inner recesses of the mainplanes when efforts were made to evict them, necessitating their being left to fledge and depart of their own free will.

Jackdaws will build in the wing tips of the Beverley, where access is provided by a lightening hole in the wing structure which is exposed when the aileron is away from the neutral position. One example of this was not discovered until the ailerons were removed for the renewal of hinge pins, and in this case there were traces of egg shell in the nest indicating either that the nest had run its full cycle and the young had fledged or alternatively that the eggs had broken when the aircraft was in flight.

Nest technique.

A bird nesting in an aircraft will use the normal materials that it would use elsewhere but in addition locking wire, string, small tools and aircraft parts, all more locally available, have been brought into use; the loose article risk is quite obvious. The classic case of aircraft materials being used occurred when one week-end a pair of jackdaws placed 62 metallic objects in the rear heater duct of a Beverley. These were not all oddments, the heaviest item being a spanner weighing 1½ oz.

Birds are instinctively secretive when nesting in an attempt to protect their nests from discovery by their enemies. Although quite capable of building a nest 'under the very noses' of tradesmen working on an aircraft, unbeknown to them, birds usually go about their nesting construction in the first and last hours of daylight and do not normally approach the nest site if there is much movement in the area. They can build a nest in a day or two and take advantage of the weekend when humans are about other business.

Birds can be persistent; for instance a pair of blackbirds who built two nests in the port engine of a Varsity started on the second as soon as the first one was pulled out, and when the second suffered the same fate they started to build a third, but this time in the starboard engine. This nest was removed immediately before the Whitsun grant and the birds made use of the holiday to build yet another nest in the port engine; by the time work was resumed after the holiday the nest was completed and contained one egg.

As the aircraft was to be unserviceable for a considerable time it was decided that the birds should be allowed to raise their brood but I suggest this decision was quite wrong, humane though it might have been. Birds very quickly develop habits and a case of persistent nest building such as this one should be fought out to the bitter end. As it is, allowing the birds to rear their young may well have produced a generation whose instinct will be to look for nesting sites in aircraft.

It seems securely established that bird nesting in aircraft may increase both by example and by fixations acquired by birds reared in such nests. It would be an interesting, though complex, experiment to colour-ring the adult and young birds found nesting in aircraft so that observations could be carried on in subsequent years.

Preventing nests.

Both the designer and the servicing crew can help to thwart the bird's ambition to nest in an aircraft. Holes of any sort in an airframe are an invitation to birds and where these holes are allied to control runs a hazard must inevitably exist. While designers may find there is little they can do to reduce the

number or size of access points, there is a lot that the chap who works on the finished article will find possible.

Remember that birds are security minded and also persistent.

Use covers or blanks as much as possible and for as long as possible between flights and during the nesting season, the next couple of months particularly, keep a weather eye open for birds, bird droppings, or signs of dropped nesting material, around the aircraft.

Remove nests or materials as soon as you find them and do not be tempted to leave the nest in situ on humanitarian grounds.

Finally, remember that having removed a nest from one site the birds can be expected to start building again nearby almost immediately and the vigil cannot therefore be given up.

(Communicated by Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.)

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CROW-PHEASANTS EATING WATER SNAILS

On the afternoon of August 4, 1962, I saw a crow-pheasant at the edge of my small lilypool. He (?) generally comes there for a drink. But instead of drinking, I saw him bend low, (the water level was nearly 4 inches from the edge of the pond) pick up water snail from the surface, place it on the ground, hold it with his left foot then quickly pull out the meat from the shell with his long powerful bill. Sometimes he brought the meat in one attempt, sometimes he was successful after two or three attempts. He would watch carefully -- then bend and pick up snail and eat it as described. He ate 16 to 17 snails before he moved off. I examined the shells. Each was picked clean and there was not one broken shell among them!

Mrs. Usha Ganguli, Delhi

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REVIEWS

THE HOUSE SPARROW. By J.D. Summers-Smith. pp. xvi plus 266 (13.5 x 20.0 cm.). With a colour frontispiece, 32 photographs in black and white, and 36 text figures. London 1963 (Collins). Price 25s. net. (Monograph No. 19 of 'The New Naturalist' series).

In the Newsletter for Birdwatchers of February 1963 was published a questionnaire concerning the house sparrow by way of suggestions to amateur birdwatchers past the listing stage how they could contribute usefully to scientific knowledge. Before we could receive any answers from readers, this book has answered practically all the questions posed in an authoritative and fascinating way!

Although the house sparrow is one of the commonest, most familiar, and may be even the most numerous species of land birds in Great Britain, not much more was precisely known about its life history than of our Indian bird till Mr. Summers-Smith entered the field. For 11 years continuously he studied, with the aid of colour-ringed local populations, the yearly cycle of the house sparrow and every individual phase connected with it in a rural as well as urban-industrial environment. Pair formation, nest building, sexual and communal display, courtship, egg-laying, clutch size, incubation and nesting success.

care of the young and their subsequent dispersal, enemies, mortality, sex ratio, and the behaviour patterns motivated by all these activities are some of the topics that form this fascinating record.

Readers of the Newsletter will recall the note reproduced in the June 1962 issue from one of Dr. Salim Ali's boyhood bird diaries, of several cock house sparrows pairing up in quick succession with the female occupant of a nest as they were shot, one after another almost daily. On p. 44 of this book is cited a case which, curiously enough, is more or less identical almost down to details. Apparently there is always a 'waiting list', or reservoir, of unmated birds of both sexes during the breeding season available for rapidly filling any vacancy that may occur through the accidental death or disappearance of one member of a mated pair, of either sex. Possibly the replacement of females is somewhat slower. The book is a mine of well-documented first hand information on every sparrow activity and behaviour pattern. The house sparrow pairs for life and is also faithful to its nest. Mated pairs have been observed to breed together for 4 or 5 years. A wild sparrow lived for 11 years; one in captivity 12 years. It is an extremely sedentary bird, and reluctant to cross even a few miles of unsuitable country. It is a highly adaptable species capable of leading a sedentary (non-migratory) existence in countries as extreme in temperature as -15°F. and 110°F. , and at altitudes from sea level to 15,000 feet. It lives everywhere in close commensalism with man, and has learnt to take full advantage of the liveable conditions he has artificially created for himself in inhospitable climes. It has been introduced into many parts of the world where it did not exist before, and it now shares with man an almost universal distribution. The secret of its overwhelming success as a colonist lies in its great adaptability in the matter of food, its aggressive and domineering disposition, and its thorough acclimatization to man-made conditions. Its pre-conditioning to life in human habitations provides it with an ecological niche which has usually not been exploited by any native species, therefore, the house sparrow enjoys freedom from competition for nest sites etc. from local residents.

The work deals primarily with the house sparrow in Great Britain, and it is but natural that details will vary in different parts of the world under different climates and ecological conditions. Thus there is a clear case for equally thorough investigations on the house sparrow in India. The extreme sedentariness of the species is responsible for the genetically different populations that have developed in different parts of its geographical range, and our Indian house sparrow (*Passer domesticus indicus*) is one of them.

This monograph, so fascinatingly written and fully documented, should serve as an admirable model for future effort here, as a valuable reference source. It will also serve as a reminder of what can be achieved by a single, even part-time observer with the necessary store of patience and dedication to field investigation.

S.A.

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COLLINS' GUIDE TO BIRDMATCHING. By R.S. Fitter. pp. 254.
London 1963, Collins. Price 21s.

Some time ago I reviewed in the Newsletter COLLINS' POCKET GUIDE TO BRITISH BIRDS, by R.S.R. Fitter and R.A. Richardson. Mr. Fitter has now produced the COLLINS GUIDE TO BIRDMATCHING. The difference is the emphasis in the title very accurately reflects the difference between the two books. The first book aimed only at helping in the identification of British birds. The present volume has a wider objective. It is nothing less than to turn a complete ignoramus into a complete birdwatcher.

The complete birdwatcher must know how to choose a good pair of binoculars, how to construct nest boxes, and feeding tables, and how to apply first aid to injured birds; he must know the laws of bird-protection, he must be able to take bird photographs and record bird song, he must be able to take bird counts and censuses, and finally he must know what sort of data he should attempt to collect in order to contribute something towards scientific ornithology. All this formidable list of information the author gives in the first part of his book which he entitles 'How to Watch Birds'.

The second and third parts are concerned with identification and so much of the material is inevitably like that in the earlier book. However it is organized in a completely different way. Instead of classifying birds by their size the author now groups them by their habits as well as habitats. The classification is careful and accurate. Even the photographs are arranged so that pictures of 3 or 4 birds are accompanied by a general view of the kind of country in which they are normally found. The photographs are not coloured but they are very sharp and beautiful.

A particularly useful feature of the book is the hundred pages of Topography Guide at the end. Here the author goes through the British Isles county by county, listing all the special places which are rewarding for birdwatchers, the special birds which can be found, the reserves and sanctuaries, and the relevant literature for that area. I wish we could have a book like this for India.

Mrs. Laeeq Futehally

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Calls of Young Birds

Appropos the note of Mr. Joseph George in Newsletter 3(4), 1963 regarding the varying calls of young cuckoos there is an interesting paragraph on the subject in the book BIRD, by Lois & Louis Darling, just published in England. The authors say that most young birds sing the song peculiar to their species even if they have never come in contact with their parents at all. For instance many birds brought up in incubators have no difficulty in singing in the traditional manner. But in the case of young nightingales they learn the song of their companions with whom they are brought in contact. If, however, at a later stage they are placed in contact with adult nightingales then they discard quickly the new calls which they have learnt and revert to the time honoured pattern of their species.

In his book on the Robin, David Lack suggests that the males

sing loudly after the young ones come out of the nest to imprint the song on the mind of the youngsters.

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Local Birdwatching Clubs

It is encouraging to find that two local birdwatching centres have recently been formed. On page 4 of this issue there is a note on a birdwatching outing at Rajkot. This was done under the auspices of the local club of which K.S. Lavkumar is the President, and Lalsinh M. Raol, the Secretary. No subscription has been laid down for the local club but individual members have been asked to join the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India.

A Nature Study Centre has been started at Guntur, South India. V. Ravi is the President. They bring out monthly bulletins which contain interesting accounts of birds seen in the locality.

We hope that members in other regions will form similar clubs and arrange for local outings.

CORRESPONDENCE

Notes on Lanius vittatus

I must thank Mr. K.S. Lavkumar for providing me with the opportunity to amplify my notes in Newsletter 3(2), 1963, with particular reference to the territory aspect. As a matter of fact, there were two other nests belonging to the same species in adjoining territories which were both destroyed prior to hatching. No detailed observations were made in regard to these nests.

I would also like to put the record straight in so far as the sketch of the territory is concerned. By an oversight three medium sized trees within the territory have been left out; these presumably have an effect on the 'entomology' of the area.

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

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Visitors to a flowering Coral tree

In early March while I was out with the cadets of the National Defence Academy for birdwatching in the nursery garden of the Academy, I noticed only one Coral tree (Erythrina indica) in blossom. Naturally it was a great attraction for birds. Just as a curiosity I went on counting the species of birds which came for nectar or otherwise and found that 15 species visited the tree within an hour's time. They are listed below:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Yellow-eyed Babbler | 2. Large Grey Babbler |
| 3. Franklin's Wren Warbler | 4. Common Myna |
| 5. Brahmini Myna | 6. Purple Sunbird |
| 7. Purple-rumped Sunbird | 8. White-eye |
| 9. Jungle Crow | 10. Redvented Bulbul |
| 11. Ashy Wren Warbler | 12. Lesser Whitethroat |
| 13. Baya Weaver Bird | 14. Roseringed Parakeet |
| 15. Little Brown Dove. | |

The last two were not seen feeding on the nectar.

All throughout the N.D.A. estate I found only a few Coral trees while there were many Silk Cotton trees. Both the species were in blossom but still the birds seemed to have a preference to the Coral tree over the Silk Cotton.

P.W. Sonan

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Poachers and the Great Indian Bustard

In connection with the observations made by Ishwar Prakash and Pulak K. Ghosh on the above subject in the Newsletter for April, the following extract from A BIRD PHOTOGRAPHER IN INDIA by Lowther should be of interest. 'It is ... worth noting that whilst my friend...a humble guard on the railway...declines to shoot or assist in the killing of this magnificent bird...he is a keen shikari and a first-class shot...others in higher walks of life, some of them placed by Government to maintain law and order, do not hesitate to shoot the Great Indian Bustard whenever they can.

'How often does a sense of what is right or wrong work among individuals in inverse ratio to what might be expected.'

Joseph George, Roorkee, U.P.

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Swallow nest

Of late on my way to office, I have been observing the nest of a swallow at the entrance of the Punjab National Bank Ltd., on Phirozeshah Mehta Road. I first saw it by chance when I followed the flight of a swallow. I saw it slowing down near the bank entrance. The nest is a very small thing, made of mud and other things. For a few days after that I saw the swallow sitting in the nest. And now, when I pass by, I see two small heads popping out and awaiting their mother eagerly. There is a white patch on their heads, and I hope my identification is correct.

B.A. Palkhiwalla

12.4.1963

[The bird is probably a Dusky Crag Martin. - Ed.]

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Birds seen in and around Bombay

Rosy Pastors: On February 17th between 8 and 9 a.m. we saw a large flock of rosy pastors in a grove of silk cotton trees in bloom on a tongue of land that runs out into the Powai Lake. There were several birds in every tree.

Darters and Cormorants: I saw Darters at Powai Lake, but at Tulsi Lake a great number of cormorants but never darters. Am I correct in this?

Fantailed Flycatchers, Orioles, etc.: On the slopes of the Hanging Gardens above Babulnath Road between Siri Road and Babulnath Temple I saw on April 6th at 7 a.m.

(i) a pair of Fantailed Flycatchers; (ii) a pair of orioles (I have seen orioles here and from the main Gibbs-Ridge Road since January), (iii) several sat bhai at different places on the hill-slope. Heard Tailor Bird and bulbuls. From the main road -- Gibbs Road -- saw Magpie Robin, green parakeet flock, Coppersmith on banyan fruit, and for the first time heard distinctly and saw a Spotter Babbler in a tree off the road.

A point I would like to make on the above. On these slopes, several children and adults have learnt to recognize and know some of our common birds. But these slopes are being shorn and destroyed -- houses, huts, garbage heaps are being pushed up Siri Road and the hillside, and a refuge of birds and bird lovers may gradually, or even quite soon, disappear.

House Sparrow: Outside my first floor window at Hughes Road, a sparrow pair is often to be seen in a rather bare drumstick tree. The cock sparrow resents the occasional appearance of a Redwhiskered Bulbul in the tree. Since the beginning of the week -- 7th April -- I have observed the pair mating several times, morning and afternoon, with a particular continued chirp that always attracts my attention. They may have begun earlier, and I notice it now, because I am more at home this week.

(Mrs.) M. Choksi

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Birds Hawking Insects on wing:

Birds like Bee-eaters and Drongos are well known for their insect hawking on wing but while I was at the National Defence Academy I found one early morning the following species busy catching insects on the wing in and around a jowar field on the banks of the Kharakvasla Lake. The victims were mainly Mayflies. The birds noted doing so are:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Purple Sunbird | 2. Bluethroat |
| 3. Baybacked Shrike | 4. Rufousbacked Shrike |
| 5. Sykes' s Tree Warbler | 6. Collard Bushchat |
| 7. Common Green Bee-eaters | 8. Common Drongo |
| 9. Blyth's Reed Warbler | 10. Ashy Wren Warbler |
| 11. Indian Pipit | 12. Tree Pipit |
| 13. Wiretailed Swallow | 14. Redrumped Swallow |
| 15. Yelloweyed Babbler | 16. Little Ringed Plover. |

The last bird was seen twice, rising a few feet above the ground and settling more or less at the same place.

P.W. Soman

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Painted Partridge in Rajasthan

Reference correspondence in Newsletter 3(3), by Shri Lavkumar referring an article by Shri S.C. Sharma in Vol. 3(2) of the Newsletter.

Painted Partridge is not new to Rajasthan. It seems that they have penetrated by the route suggested long time ago. I have a skinned specimen collected from a place near Udaipur at least 10 years ago. Udaipur and Kotah division is full of Painted Partridges. A few years ago I noticed one at a place about 30 miles from Ajmer, and now Mr. Sharma has collected specimens from Pushkar which is only 8 miles from Ajmer. It seems that Painted Partridge is found all over Rajasthan except in the drier parts.

Black Partridges are found in Alwar division of Rajasthan. It is certainly surprising that it was not checked before.

R.N. Chatterjee

Nat. Hist. Soc., Mayo College.

Notes for the Newsletter

I hope I can make good by writing you masterpieces for the Newsletter over the next few months. One article is due now, and it is almost ready -- Delhi birds, etc. Does Nepal interest you? What about Kashmir. I shall be there in May. In June I go to Afghanistan.

Back in Delhi in three weeks time, I am going out to Najafgarh with Peter Jackson.....

Jasper Newsome,
Nepal
30 March 1963

[Let us have the notes quickly. - Ed.]

ABSTRACTS

From the New Scientist, No. 331, 21 March 1963

The means by which migrating birds navigate at night are still in dispute. One view is that they have a remarkable hereditary mechanism for orientating themselves by the stars. Others disagree with the interpretation of the supporting experiments, which involved the orientation of birds towards stars projected on a planetarium dome.

An interesting implication of the star navigation theory is that birds must somehow be able to make adjustments to the slowly changing pattern of constellations. It has recently been suggested in Evolution by S.L. Agron of the State University, New Jersey, that birds could probably do this.

An important astronomical change, affecting bird navigation, is due to the precession of the Earth's axis -- similar to the wobbling motion of a spinning top -- resulting in a changed relationship between the constellations and the seasons. The precession cycle takes about 26,000 years to complete. Consequently star patterns shift completely from one season to the next every 6500 years (spring stars of one year being winter stars 6500 years later) and there will be a complete reversal of summer and winter, and of autumn and spring, stars every 13,000 years. The stars therefore shift almost one minute of arc per annual bird migration.

The author emphasises that the stars possibly used by the warbler today in its journey from Europe to Africa are quite different from the ones guiding its ancestors 6000 years ago. As significant evolutionary changes have been shown to occur in vertebrates in as little as 300 years, the bird's problem of adjustment to the rapid change -- from a biological viewpoint -- in the astronomical pattern is not as great as it might at first appear.

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 June



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RECOVERIES OF RINGED BIRDS

Since the last announcement (Newsletter Vol. 2, No. 9, 1962) of recoveries of birds ringed under the BNHS/WHO Bird Migration Field Study Project, information regarding three more recoveries of our ringed birds has come in. The particulars are as follows:

Date Ringed	Ring No. & species	Place ringed	Date re-covered	Place re-covered	Remarks
23.3.62	A-10220 <u>Passer domes-</u> <u>-ticus parkini?</u> (Kashmir Sparrow)	Bharatpur, Rajasthan, c. 27° 13' N. x 77° 32' E.	2.6.62	Near Chemolgan, Kaske-lan Dist., Alma-Ata region, Kazakh SSR. c. 43°12' N. x 76°37' E.	c. 1800 km. directly north of Bharatpur
2.2.63	A-33005 <u>Motacilla</u> <u>flava beema</u> (Blueheaded Yellow Wagtail)	Edanad, Chengamur, Alleppy Dist., Kerala, c. 9°20' N. x 76°38' E.	10.5.63	Neighbourhood of Nowabad-Bagrami village, east of Kabul, c. 34°30' N. x 69°13' E.	c. 2800 km. north of Edanad

Date Ringed	Ring No. & species	Place ringed	Date recovered	Place recovered	Remarks
25.2.63	AB-7960 <u>Motacilla</u> <u>indica</u> (Forest Wagtail)	Edanad, Chengalur, Alleppy Dist., Kerala, c. 9°20' N. x 76°38' E.	25.4.63	Tiddim, Chin Hills, Burma, c. 23°50' N. x 93°70' E.	c. 2400 km. NE. of Edanad

The last record is particularly gratifying since even less is known of the Forest Wagtail's migrations than of other species'. There is some speculative evidence to suggest that the bird arrives in South India by way of the Andamans.

Salim Ali

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THE NESTING HABITS OF THE PURPLE SUNBIRD

I have observed quite a few pairs of Purple Sunbird nesting in March, April, and May in the National Defence Academy Estate. Many nests are typical of this species as described in Salim Ali's and Whistler's books. However, I have also noticed a few sunbirds who have chosen to breed in the large greyish coloured nests of the spiders (Stegodyphus sarasinorum).

I have observed the Purple Sunbird nesting in the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and now here (Poona), but never before have I seen this bird make use of the spider's nest. G.M. Henry in his book A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON has described the Purple Sunbird and Loten's Sunbird using the spiders' nests for breeding and all the nests I have come across here are as described by him. I quote: 'wherever the gregarious spider Stegodyphus sarasinorum makes its large communal nests of greyish cobweb in bushes, Loten's Sunbird saves itself a lot of work by simply pressing a cavity into the side of one of these masses of cobweb and lining it with vegetable down. (Does it deal with its spider-landlords by eating them?)' and according to him the majority of nests of the Purple Sunbird are made in the cobweb masses of the gregarious spider.

My observations of the two types of nests, i.e. the typical and the spider's web, have brought to light an interesting fact. The typical type of nests were liable to be robbed by other birds and animals while the ones made in the spiders' nests were not. Of the 10 typical type of nests I observed 6 were robbed, while all the 4 nests made in the spider's cobwebs survived.

I wonder if the Purple Sunbird in India is becoming wiser and changing its nesting habit, to protect itself from other birds etc. and learning to save itself lots of work. I wonder if other observers have noticed this. More information and study of this subject would be of interest.

The Purplerumped Sunbird also nests in this area, but the time it breeds is different to the Purple Sunbird, i.e. from July to September. Last year I came across quite a few nests but none was made in a spider's nest. This may be due to the fact that during this period the rainfall here is quite heavy and spiders' nests are probably not very comfortable to use or are not available at that time.

I have been able to take some quite good colour pictures of the Purple Sunbird nesting in a spider's nest, and would be glad to make them available to the readers for study.

Col. Baljit Singh

National Defence Academy, Kharakvasla, Poona

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In my last note in the Newsletter (Vol.3(4), April 1963) I recorded some impressions of the bird life around Bombay in February.

At the beginning of March I went north to Delhi, by train. From the comforts of the air-conditioned express I looked out at a cross section of Indian countryside. I saw almost fifty species of birds from the train, including many new to me, such as the Whiteneked Stork, Adjutant, Sarus Crane, White Ibis, Peafowl and others.

I arrived in Delhi and arranged to stay outside the city at Mehrauli, under the shadow of Qutab Minar. There was a large well irrigated tomato plantation, surrounded by a high wall and many large trees. This was an ideal place for birds. In the evening they would collect to drink from the channels, and in the trees there was a large roost of Roseringed Parakeets. Among the birds that I saw there for the first time were Brahminy Myas, the Goldenbacked Woodpecker, and the Common Green Pigeon.

One day Mrs. Ganguli kindly took me out to Najafgarh lake. This was certainly one of the most memorable experiences of my bird-watching life. Never have I seen so many species in a day, or so many water birds collected together on a single lake.

There were innumerable species of Palaearctic duck and waders which I know as breeding birds or passage migrants in Europe, and also several species of Palaearctic waders, which owing to the eastern bias of their range occur only very seldom in western Europe. Among these was the Marsh Sandpiper, surely one of the most beautiful waders because of its perfect elegance, and another fine wader, the Whitetailed Lapwing, which has a superb wing pattern.

Out of the fourteen new species of that day, the most interesting was the Desert Wheatear, which strangely enough was in full song, a chattering affair offered up from the ground. I found this bird interesting because becoming acquainted with it here increases my chances of detecting it one day in the British Isles, to which it is a very rare straggler for the same reasons as the waders mentioned above.

Another interesting thing about the birds of northern India in winter was that many of them I know in Europe in the summer were there for the winter, and behaving differently. For example the pipits were hard to identify because they did not call, similarly the leaf warblers, Lesser Whitethroats, and Moustached Warblers only became obvious when I sat down by bushes and waited for them to emerge, or put up mist-nets and caught them.

After two weeks in the Delhi area I went down to Jodhpur, Jaipur, and then across to Agra. In Rajasthan I saw several interesting birds of prey, the Pied Harrier, the Longlegged Buzzard, and also the Hobby, a bird I know from my own country as a summer migrant. I also saw the two Adjutants, Painted Storks, Siberian Cranes, and several lone Houbara Bustards, a bird readers of the Newsletter may recall having recently occurred in England for the first time for sixtyseven years.

From Agra I went along the Ganga to Mokameh, then across the river and up to Raxaul and into Nepal.

On the beaches of the Ganga I saw several interesting birds, among them the Lesser Sand Flover and the Small Indian Pratincole and several terns.

The birds I saw in Nepal were so many and so varied that I should not know where to start describing them, and besides, perhaps they are really beyond the scope of this Newsletter, so I am saved the trouble, (or forbidden the pleasure ?) of going into detail.

After Nepal I went back to Delhi and on to Calcutta, where I spent an excellent morning in some small jungle with Mr. P.K. Sen Gupta, seeing

some very fine woodland species such as the Lined Parrot, Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher, Little Minivet, Emerald Dove, and the Crested Serpent Eagle.

Leaving Calcutta I went to Konarak and Puri, but failed to reach the Chilka Lake. However, at Puri I saw many waders on their way north, among them (to me) a new species, the Large Sand Plover, several examples of which were in full breeding plumage with superb brick red napes, necks and pectoral bands. A magnificent bird to see was the Whitebellied Sea Eagle, a juvenile, which flew along the sea front of Puri only fifty feet above the crowds of bathers.

To end my days there I saw three species of tern, among them the Large Crested, another new species for me.

At the time of writing I am back in Calcutta, preparing to leave for Darjeeling and Assam, where I hope to see a lot of birds. In late May I go to Kashmir and then to Afghanistan. If the editor chases me vigorously enough, I may produce a final article to conclude this wonderful visit to India and her birds.

Jasper Newsome

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THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD IN RAJASTHAN

Talking about the Great Indian Bustard, I am reminded of my home district, Kota in Rajasthan. The bird is not very uncommon in the area and on countless occasions I have come across this magnificent bird. Though the majority of the district is under the plough there are certain areas which because of the hard rocky surface layer are uncultivable. To the west and to the south of the main township of Kota there extends a vast 'pathar'. It is an undulating expanse of rocky land through which the river Chambal makes its awe-inspiring gorge. The plateau gradually rises as you go south and finally ends in the fault of the hills of Mukundwar, Bhanisrorgarh, Chittor and Bijolia. This desolate, harsh, rugged and windswept landscape I have often traversed and apart from coming across gazelle and blackbuck I have on countless occasions encountered the Great Indian Bustard.

My attention to the existence of these birds was first drawn in March 1952. I was collecting fish for my aquarium from the nallahs, and scattered small ponds when I was attracted by a bird in flight. From a distance it looked like a vulture, but the wing beats were regular and powerful. When it passed near me I discerned the stretched neck, the extended legs and the white underparts. I had seen the bird for the first time, but it was unmistakable. Following this I made constant endeavours to observe more birds whenever I was home during the vacations. At that time I was ignorant about the dwindling population of these birds and I am guilty of shooting one myself. However, I observed lots of birds in subsequent years. The birds are more frequently met during the rainy season, though I have also seen them during the summer months and the winter months. The early months of the monsoon probably bring these birds to this area either for food or for breeding. In July 1955 in my short round of 15 miles from my home I came across 17 birds. They were mostly seen in pairs. The hitherto bleak and forbidding landscape had become alive with the rains and these birds were feeding on sprouting shoots or making short runs and catching grasshoppers or crickets. One bird even burst forth from a near-by bush but I failed to detect any nest. Perhaps the most fascinating sight was a congregation of 12 birds. They were just lousing around. A few of them sat as if on nests. On my approach they started scattering and I made a detour and let them alone. Again in October 1957 while on my usual escapades, I came across two birds. They were far apart. The one nearer to me started calling as I approached it. It maintained a distance of about 60 yards from me and kept on walking without taking to the wings. I suspected a nest somewhere and started searching the ground. When I was nearing the other bird I came across two young ones. Now their age I would not be

able to guess. They stood nearby as tall as the White Ibis, though very much slimmer. Their appearance was shabby for they had not attained the full adult plumage, even the black crown was missing in parts. The innocent creatures eyed me with curiosity and allowed me near enough when I could clearly see the bright yellow pupil of their eyes. When I stood and watched them instead of passing by their curiosity turned to fright and they took to their wings. Their flight was unsteady and they settled down again a furlong away.

It clearly indicates that the birds, if not disturbed by the cattle, do successfully breed in this area and here was perhaps one case which I observed. What the conditions now are, I cannot say. The last time when I went out for a search was in July 1961, and I returned disappointed. Though the local shikaris of the Kota township are quite ignorant of their existence in this area, lately a lot of cattle have migrated here from Marwar and Ajmer. It is quite possible that the birds have moved further away. However, as a matter of interest I may add that three such successive plateaux extend southwards from Kota to Susuer in Shajapur District of Madhya Pradesh.

Pratap Singh,

A.S.P. Khargon, W. Nimar (M. P.)

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REVISED CHECK-LIST OF THE BIRDS OF DELHI AND THE COMMON NAMES OF INDIAN BIRDS

Recently I assisted General Williams in the production of a revised Check-list of the 'Birds of Delhi and District'. Most of the additional information in this list was provided by Mrs. Usha Ganguli and Mr. Julian Donahue. Copies of the check-list are available with the Honorary Secretary of the Delhi Bird Watching Society (Capt. S.K. Chatterjee, Naval Headquarters, New Delhi), and I am sure that he would be glad to send a copy to anyone specially interested in it.

We ran up against a number of problems in naming some of the birds logically. The arrangement of birds is the one used by Ripley in his SYNOPSIS. To our dismay we found that in many instances not only the scientific name but also the common (trivial) name of birds had been changed. This is very confusing to the amateur. We are not quite certain that we have not made mistakes in locating the new names of birds. On the other hand, we saw with a sense of relief that Ripley does not give common names to subspecies except in rare instances such as Saker and Laggar Falcons. However, this policy seems to have led him to the use of some extraordinary common names. The 'Black-throated Thrush' is called the 'Redthroated Thrush' and the 'Indian Pipit' becomes the 'Paddyfield Pipit'.

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Joseph George,
Central Building Research Institute,
Roorkee, U.P.

C O M M E N T

Mr. George Joseph has touched upon a point of which the unsatisfactoriness -- inconsistency, and even absurdity -- has long been felt by students of Indian birds. Most of the incognuities, of course, stem from the fact that English names for our birds were 'manufactured' or bodily transposed by Britishers familiar with their own birds when up against species in this country for which naturally no English names existed before. Many of the qualifying words they employed, such as 'Common', really applied to what was common to them in England, thus The Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis). In other cases they very sensibly took over the names in local use, thus Pitta, Cutia, Bulbul, Myna, Koel, and others. While admitting the unsuitability of many English names and some recently proposed 'improvements', I personally feel that it would be rather a waste of effort to try to 're-align' more or less well understood trivial names at this stage. Since our main objective now is to popularize bird study among our own countrymen -- for which Hindi or regional language books are absolutely essential -- what seems to me most needed is the selection and standardization of such names as already exist, in whatever Indian language, or to invent or adapt simple names from foreign languages where such are not available. For this it would be necessary first of all to create some competent central authority -- preferably a small committee of bird students of recognised competence -- whose writ can reasonably be expected to function without too much pettifogging argumentation. The position as regards current trivial English names emphasizes what I have consistently advocated, namely the need for all serious bird watchers to familiarize themselves with, and memorize and use, the internationally accepted scientific names of birds. This is a far simpler exercise than it appears, and is indeed the only means of expanding ones ornithological horizon beyond narrow parochial limits.

Salim Ali

* * * * *

able to guess. They stood nearby as tall as the White Ibis, though very much slimmer. Their appearance was shabby for they had not attained the full adult plumage, even the black crown was missing in parts. The innocent creatures eyed me with curiosity and allowed me near enough when I could clearly see the bright yellow pupil of their eyes. When I stood and watched them instead of passing by their curiosity turned to fright and they took to their wings. Their flight was unsteady and they settled down again a furlong away.

It clearly indicates that the birds, if not disturbed by the cattle, do successfully breed in this area and here was perhaps one case which I observed. What the conditions now are, I cannot say. The last time when I went out for a search was in July 1961, and I returned disappointed. Though the local shikaris of the Kota township are quite ignorant of their existence in this area, lately a lot of cattle have migrated here from Marwar and Ajmer. It is quite possible that the birds have moved further away. However, as a matter of interest I may add that three such successive plateaux extend southwards from Kota to Susmer in Shajapur District of Madhya Pradesh.

Pratap Singh,

A.S.P. Khargon, W. Nimar (M. P.)

* * * * *

REVISED CHECK-LIST OF THE BIRDS OF DELHI AND THE COMMON NAMES OF INDIAN BIRDS

Recently I assisted General Williams in the production of a revised Check-list of the 'Birds of Delhi and District'. Most of the additional information in this list was provided by Mrs. Usha Ganguli and Mr. Julian Donahue. Copies of the check-list are available with the Honorary Secretary of the Delhi Bird Watching Society (Capt. S.K. Chatterjee, Naval Headquarters, New Delhi), and I am sure that he would be glad to send a copy to anyone specially interested in it.

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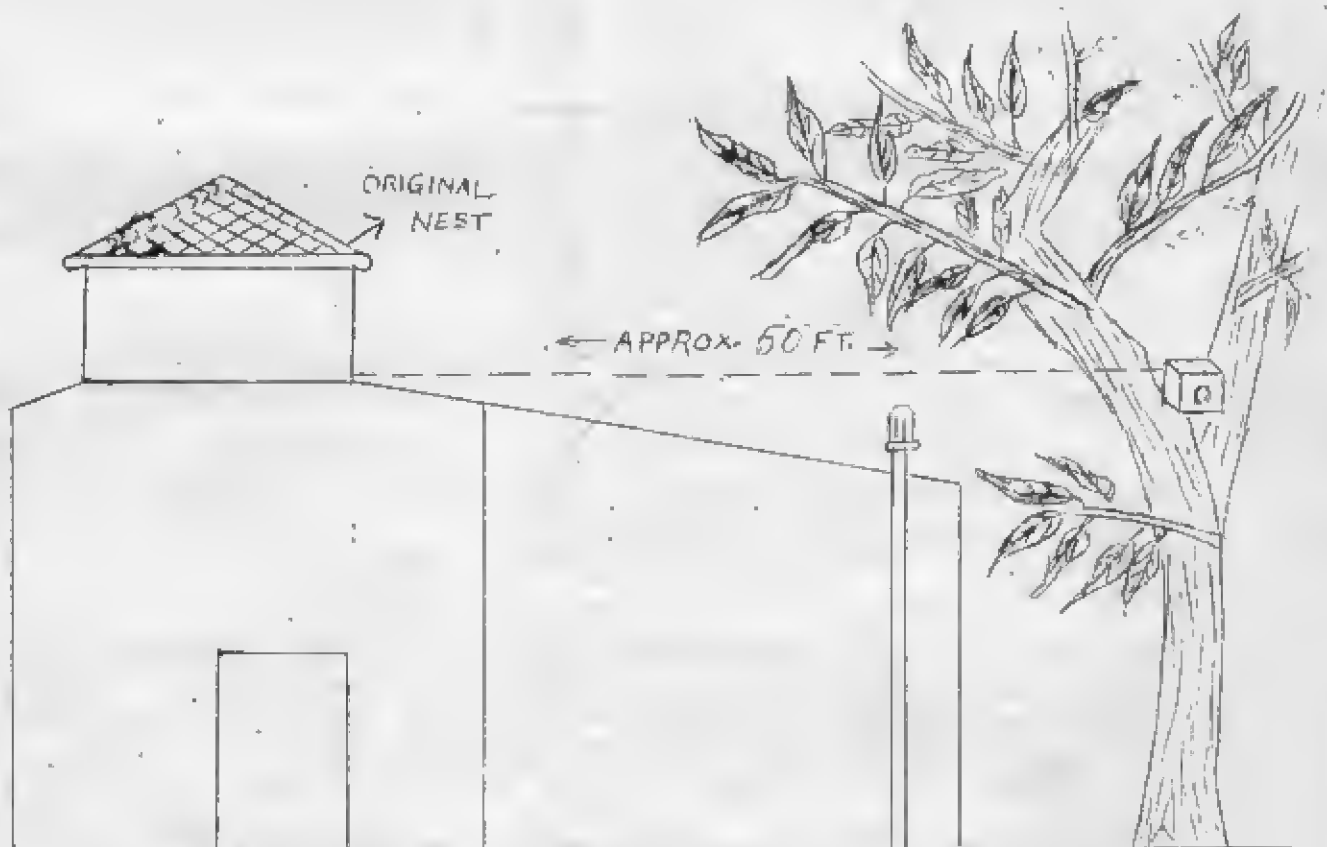
FINDING THE 'DAIYAR' or MAGPIE-ROBIN'S NEST

The nest of the daiyar or Magpie-Robin is not a difficult thing to find. One gets an early indication of the general area where it is likely to be by the position taken up by the cock bird when pouring out his morning song. Thereafter while the male stands guard the female can be seen carrying nesting material to the nest for long hours during the day. All this time the male does not help in the least.

During this season, however, in spite of a clear indication that the nest was somewhere near my house I was unable to find the location. Once or twice I saw the female with casuarina needles in her beak perched on a gul mohr tree but my binoculars made her somewhat apprehensive, and in the game of patience she ultimately won.

On the 13 May while I was in the office I got a frantic telephone from my servant asking me to come as there were five daiyar chicks under a Mangalore tile on the roof of my house. The tile was removed for the routine pre-monsoon repairs. I went home and found that there were five chicks on the roof exposed to the sun and looking very uncomfortable. Their eyes were still closed.

I hurriedly removed a nest box which I had put up on a mango tree and transferred this family into it. The nest box was again put up on the tree about 50 feet away from the original site of the nest. During the transfer of the



nursery from the roof to the nest box in the tree the parent birds were not in evidence at all, and I was extremely apprehensive that the family would not be reunited, and the chicks would die.

This transfer took place at about 9 in the morning. I telephoned the house again at about 1 p.m. and was delighted to learn from my servant that both the male and the female daiyar had established contact with the chicks and had been feeding them since about 10.30 in the morning.

When I came home in the evening I found that the parents were feeding the chicks by just perching outside the nest box, and it seemed to me that once or twice they attempted to get into the box without success, the $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch entrance hole seemed to be a little too small. I brought the box down again and made the hole a little wider. This enabled the birds to get in from time to time.

At the time of writing (22nd May) the family is doing very well.

Zafar Futehally

REVIEWS

BIRD. By Lois and Louis Darling. 261 pp. London 1963. Methuen. Price 30 sh.

About ten years ago this reviewer came across a book which was a summing up of general ornithology applicable to all birds. In *THE BIRD*, as the book was called, Gertrud Hess presented a striking picture of the astonishing perfection of birds.

BIRD does this too and more. It conveys the beauty of the 'intricate adaptedness' of the bird's body and its present capacity for performance. The process of evolution which produced this perfection is described in the first part of the book. In the orderly progress of evolution, the authors find a suggestion that it has a preconceived direction, or a goal. Since evolution itself is not a conscious process, this seems to imply that something other than itself gave it that direction and set that goal.

Part two which deals with Behaviour gives concise accounts of instinct, display, learning, reproduction, social behaviour, and migration. The word instinct as applied to behaviour is 'a name to our ignorance'. Instinctive activity is often inappropriate to unusual situations. For example, Penguins which feed on shrimp in the water will sit quietly on land and starve to death beside a heap of the same shrimp. The reviewer has watched the Common Hawk-Cuckoo on trees whose branches were covered with the white porcupine-like bug *Phromia*. Now and then one of these creatures would move and the bird would immediately take it. The masses of *Phromia* that remained motionless were not touched. Was the bird's behaviour appropriate in this naturally occurring situation?

We all have heard of the 'peck order' among flocks of domestic fowl. The leader of such a flock is, however, not the bird highest in the peck order, but some lowly member of the group, often a female! Leadership is not dominance.

Part three on anatomy and physiology contains many Latin names, but a study of this section will give us a 'new dimension of appreciation' for birds. The chapter on flight is a very lucid account of the subject. In spite of all the advances in plastic foams and synthetic textiles, men have not been able to make a better material for warm sleeping bags than eider down.

BIRD is profusely illustrated with drawings and delightful sketches by the authors themselves. The treatment of bird life in the context of all other life is another interesting feature of the book. Hawks and birdwatchers for instance, have their ears spaced too far apart to determine the location of short wave length, high frequency alarm, calls of small birds, while birds and baseball players alike have a moral advantage in being on home grounds!

BIRD should help us to understand not only birds but also ourselves better.

J. G.

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HAMARE JAL PAKSHI. By Rajeshwarprasad Narain Sinha. pp. 87. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1962. A book of the National Book Trust. Price Rs2.50

This small book in Hindi abounds in mistakes, misleading statements, and confusion. It is to be regretted that such a book should have been published by the Government.

In describing some seventyfive ducks and waders; the author has often relied on his imagination rather than on careful study or observation. He writes, for instance, that the Fantail Snipe has a fan-shaped tail and the Pintail Snipe a pin-shaped tail. Incredible though it may seem, the feather pattern in the tail of both snipes is illustrated! But the author makes no use of it.

The book is profusely illustrated, but some of the illustrations are sure to confuse rather than help the reader. A drawing of the Reef Heron (which is not even mentioned in the book) appears where the Pond Heron is described. The Pinkheaded Duck is illustrated under the name lalsar which, according to the text, is the Common Pochard but according to the glossary is the Redcrested Pochard.

The Pinkheaded Duck which is virtually extinct is described as being widely distributed. The epithet 'lily among birds' which Hume used for the Great White Crane is transferred to the Sarus Crane. The Flamingo gets first position among ducks. It is stated that some ducks swim several miles under water, that flocks of 200 to 300 Tufted Pochards (the author has no name for this bird) disappear under water on the approach of human beings, and that half the head of the White Ibis is black.

The Bombay Natural History Society receives special mention. It is reported that this Society prepared 'with great effort' a list of the birds of India 'but even today several birds do not find a place in it.

One fails to understand how HAMARE JAL PAKSHI could have been accepted as a book of the National Book Trust.

J.G.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Attention is being drawn all over the world by responsible bodies to the havoc caused by toxic chemicals to wild life in general and birds in particular. Rachel Carson's classic SILENT SPRING has had a powerful impact on public opinion in America and England, and the unthinking use of pesticides, particularly the chlorinated hydrocarbons will perhaps be arrested to a certain extent. But it will take a long time even to undo the damage that has already been caused. In Bird Study of March 1963, there is a report of the Birds of Prey Conference which was held in Cambridge in March this year. The Conference 'finds conclusive evidence of an alarming decline in numbers of birds of prey in Britain over the past six years.....the chief factor in this rapid decline is the use of toxic chemicals.....'

In America the decline in the number of Bald Eagles, their National Bird, has been causing grave concern. Actually the National Audubon Society's Bald Eagle Project revealed a slight increase in the eagle population -- 3807 in 1962 as compared to 3642 in 1961. But in many areas nesting success has been rather poor and toxic chemicals can be one of the reasons. This is certainly the cause of the decline in the case of many other species of birds. The President of the National Audubon Society in his annual report suggests that the U.S. Department of Agriculture shift the emphasis from the general reliance on toxic chemicals to research in biological controls. In our country we must avoid the mistakes of the more 'advanced' nations who are paying such a heavy price for the careless use of pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides on their farms, fields and rivers. Let us always remem

ber the saying of the Bantu tribes of South-west Africa that 'A person should not shoot a bird resting on his own head'. Unfortunately this sound advice is not being followed.

CORRESPONDENCE

A new sketch for the Newsletter cover

Herewith a sketch of Whitebacked Munias (Lonchura striata) perching on a casuarina tree (Casuarina equisetifolia). The birds started building a globular nest on Sunday, the 12th, and finished the same on the 14th May. By kneeling on the top of my car, I was able to put my finger in the lateral entrance of the nest on the 16th, and found no eggs.

S.V. Nilakanta
The Theosophical Society, Adyar,
Madras 20

[The sketch will be used for the cover of the July issue.- Ed.]

* * * *

The House Sparrow

It is observed near my house at Goregaon during the months of October and November 1962, the House Sparrows (Passer domesticus) cut off bit by bit complete flowers of Canna indica. These flowers were mostly of yellow and orange colours. First it was thought that the birds are searching for any insects in the flowers, but after careful observation I could see that the petals of the flowers are slowly eaten up.

Two nests were built by some of these sparrows on the waste-water pipes along the building wall. After eating they were seen to visit these nests. Therefore, these nests were also examined for parts of the petals. But none could be recovered. It also confirms that the petals are eaten up by them. I feel this observation may be of interest.

A.K. Joshee, Ph.D.

Goregaon (West), Bombay 62

* * * *

Domestic Fowl

I saw at some places in Goregaon and Matunga that the feathers of 2 or 3 fowls were more erected and almost tending in a forward direction. I would like to know whether it is a known genetic factor or the fowls have the capacity for such movements of feathers? I have not observed these fowls over and over again.

A.K. Joshee, Ph.D.

Goregaon (West), Bombay 62

[Frizzled plumage in fowls is genetically controlled. In this artificial breed the upright set of the feathers is believed to be an adaptation to tropical conditions, permitting free escape of body heat. In Europe the birds have to be kept in heated rooms in winter, otherwise they succumb to the cold. -- Ed.]

* * * *

Colour difference in House Sparrow eggs

I had a chance to observe a pair of House Sparrows nesting in my animal house. They had been chased from their nest sites twice by mynas.

..... !!

Still they are building tirelessly the third nest right in front of my working table. They have laid four eggs and incubation is carried on. The striking difference is that out of the four eggs three are of sandy grey colour blotched with brown spots. The fourth one is blotched with brown spots densely on the broad end and the general colour is white instead of sandy grey as in the other three. Does the colour change in the eggs has any significance with the sex of the young that has to hatch?

K. Janakireman,
Ford Foundation Project Institute
of Agriculture
Anand

[It is not uncommon for one egg in a house sparrow's clutch, and also in many other birds', to be differently coloured from the rest. This variation has often led to the mistaken assumption that it was laid by a different bird, or by a parasitic cuckoo. The difference in comparative size and weight of a cuckoo's egg, usually larger and heavier than the fosterer's, provides the clue. As far as is known the different egg coloration has no significance for the hatchling. — Ed.]

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Fatality to Barbets flying against walls

of/ Reference Capt. Tyabji's interesting note on the fatality to barbets flying against walls of buildings in the Newsletter for May 1963. I think the explanation in the first case is that the birds were so engrossed in chasing one another that they paid no heed to where they were going till too late to realize that they were going to the wall! In the second case also — that the Large Green Barbet in New Delhi — the explanation could well be the same, one of the birds either chaser or chased, being lucky to get away without colliding with the building.

It is well known that even normally shy birds, and other animals, possess enviable powers of concentration and will face reckless hazards when driven by the vital urges of sex or hunger. I once fired at a peregrine as it stooped at a wounded whitetailed lapwing struggling on the water of a jheel. So intent was the bird on its quarry that it stooped again and again regardless of three charges of dust shot at fairly close range which sent its feathers flying and showed blood on its underside, and the loud reports of the gun. I had two cock sparrows fly straight into me while watching a game of hockey in an open maidan before they realized that I was made of flesh and not thin air! In Orissa I once fired at something rolling over and over among dry leaves on the forest floor which turned out to be two male purplerumped sunbirds locked in vicious combat. One of the birds got killed by a pellet, but the other continued to wrestle with it regardless. He only woke to the situation when I picked up the tangled pair, and then he promptly let go its adversary and flew off unhurt. I have recorded in my report of the Travancore-Cochin bird survey 30 years ago, picking up a Bronzewinged Dove that had been killed by impact with the whitewashed wall of a coffee plantation bungalow. I was informed by the owner that Bronzewinged Doves were constantly coming to grief in this way and that numbers had been picked up dead at the foot of this wall. In this case it was probably that the birds, always dashing at great speed, took the sunlit patches on the wall seen through the dense surrounding shrubbery, to be patches of open sky and only discovered their mistake too late.

Mist netters will tell you that the best chances of getting a wagtail or two, or larks or pipits, into a net optimistically placed in an open field in daytime are when one bird suddenly attacks and chases another as is their wont. They then become completely oblivious of the net which a few moments before they had so studiously (and aggravatingly) hedge-hopped or bye-passed!

Salim Ali

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Crow-Pheasants eating water snails

The note by Mrs. Usha Ganguli on page 8 of your May 1963 issue about Crow-Pheasants eating water snails, serves to emphasize further the catholicity of the bird in the choice of its animal food, and its versatility in procuring it. It would be interesting to get the snail identified. Perhaps Mrs. Ganguli could collect a few of the shells and send them to the Bombay Natural History Society?

In Bahawalpur I once found a Crow-Pheasant flopping on the water, and hanging from a fish hook. This was one of many hooks suspended at intervals by the local fishermen from a rope stretched taut across a narrow inlet of a jheel a few inches above the water surface. The bird had evidently settled on the rope, hauled up the line and, in an excess of greed, swallowed the bait together with the hook. The barb of the hook had pierced the gullet and was sticking outside. The stomach of this specimen, as also of another shot in this neighbourhood, contained exclusively remains of small fish such as those baited on the hooks, so this food item apparently formed the main attraction for crow-pheasants in the locality.

Salim Ali

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Bulbuls eating flowers

The Whitebrowed, the Redvented, and the Redwhiskered Bulbuls have the habit of eating the white petals of the 'single' Ervatamia coronaria flowers in the garden. The Whitebrowed Bulbul finishes off about six or more flowers at one stretch and sometimes flies away with the petal in its beak. This bulbul visits also the Argyreia campanulata plants in the garden and eats the tin portions of the pale mauve corolla of the flowers. Unlike E. coronaria A. campanulata is an introduced plant.

I was able to observe the birds for about three weeks from April 12, 1963 at different localities of the College Campus. Their favourite time is around 2.30 in the afternoon when it is quite hot.

Gift Siromoney,
Madras Christian College, Madras.

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About our Newsletter

I became acquainted with birds at an early age, seven, through my elder brother. It was, however, at Udaipur that I really gained knowledge in the subject. Unfortunately soon after that my brother went into the army and I was at a great loss and when I grew up there was nobody to guide me in making notes and observations. To tell you very frankly, I have never made notes for I did not know what to note down! Most of the observations I passed as being of no importance and not until Mr. Lavkumar gave me a copy of Newsletter for Birdwatchers at Mount Abu last year I realized that many observations which I just passed as trivial could have been of importance.

Pratap Singh
A.S.P. Khargone, W. Nimar (M.P.)

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 July



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THE PARASITIC KOEL

Baisaki came and went away and with it went the last traces of coolth. The summer is directly on us and the sun has developed a sharp sting. The breeze laden with the aroma of flowers lazily and languidly sighs through the newly foliated trees, collecting the dead leaves or whatever is left of them. The mulberry, the shisham, the muwba, the neem, and the vine stand proudly and majestically in their Sunday best displaying their flowers and tender new leaves which shine in the sun. The black bee hums incessantly round the flowers and a varied colour is added by the visit of many birds like parrots, mynas, starlings, bulbuls, and green pigeons which raid the mulberry and muwba trees.

And yet a fascinating drama of nature unfolds itself in all these busy activities. The paramount purpose, the survival of race, goes on in a subtle way behind these scenes. The bees, the butterflies, and the birds attracted by the aroma and the lure of honey, inadvertently and unknowingly pollinate and fertilize the flowers and later on act as agents for dispersal of seeds. The birds on their own sing, woo, dance, and fight in a wild chorus almost nonstop throughout the day.

There are nests of at least a dozen kinds of birds in our compound and there is a frantic rush by others to settle down before it is too late. The mynas have come and occupied two holes in our verandah near the ceiling and in hastily constructed nests

have lain some eggs. They are perpetually quarreling with each other. In the general scramble you find two of them on the ground pecking and clawing at each other for all they are worth and then suddenly the others come and join the fray and unsportingly hitting the fallen foe. I do not understand this. Near the mynes on the beams, patiently sits the female pigeon, controlling the brood, while the male pigeons come and go noisily. A pair of sparrows persist in building a home on the top portion of a ceiling fan and in spite of repeated failures they even deposited two eggs in it the other day. Of course they immediately fell down. I feel sorry for them but they haven't given up their futile pursuit. The bulbuls have made a neat little nest in our jasmine creeper and the male and the female sit over three eggs in turns without much fuss. Not far away from these in the same creeper is a cozy nest of a tailor bird without any egg in it so far. A pair of turtle doves perched themselves in one corner of the skylight in our sitting room and within a matter of days brought out two ugly looking young ones with big innocent eyes who keep on fluttering all over the place in the room, much to my wife's disgust. The parrots have monopolized the holes in the neem trees and made at least six nests in them and there is day long fight amongst themselves. A sturdy male partridge, full of fight, stands on the compound wall and gives out every morning and evening his full-throated challenging call of titlo- titlo- titlo, as he stands sentinel over the nest in the near-by shrub where sits the female unobserved. A pair of Indian Rollers have made themselves comfortable in a hole in a Gul Mohar tree and in an improvised nest sits the female over three jade coloured eggs. The male sits on the dry branches above and woe unto anyone who passes nearby. Without provocation he darts like an arrow and pecks furiously. A smooth head like mine is like a red rag to him and my little dog Fluffy with his inquisitive nose receives a lot of attention. The Hoopoes have occupied the garage, and the male one sits on the roof opening and closing his feather crown continuously.

But the most exciting of them all is the episode of the crow and the koel. In the one corner of our lawn is a big neem tree. It must have been very old as half of it is dried up, and its trunk is almost hollow. In one dry branch of this tree high up a pair of crows have built their nest, a sloppy, untidy collection of sticks and wires, and in it sits the female crow over her eggs doing her day long vigil. The male crow is round about, doing sentry duty and ever ready to pounce upon any unwelcome intruder. A crow is particularly vicious while guarding eggs or young ones. Not far away from this tree is a small mango grove, a favourite haunt of the Koel and the Golden Orioles. A few mornings back, from my verandah I watched a most fascinating drama enacted there. A big black koel came and settled down on an Indian cork tree, not far away from the crow's nest and let out its shrill stammering call in quick succession. Something like cowuh, cowuh, cowuh. The male crow always alert shot out and darted on her and chased her out into the mango grove. The koel kept on jumping from branch to branch, avoiding the vicious onslaught but continuing his teasing call. This kept on for a minute or so and then lo! and behold suddenly the female crow also got up and joined the chase, leaving the nest unprotected. The rest was a simple matter. The ruse worked and the female koel hiding in the mango grove and waiting for such an opportunity quietly slipped into the crow's nest unobserved and by the time the shrewd crows returned from their triumphant chase the damage had been done and their nest was plus an extra egg.

A koel is a legendary bird in our country, known for its light-hearted, happy, and playful nature. It is therefore too much of a botheration for a fun-loving creature like her to accept the

responsibility of building a nest, sitting on eggs, and then roosting the young ones. Hence cleverly it has evolved a simple solution for all this. It simply lays its eggs in the crow's nest and takes no further part in the life history of the young ones till they are fully grown. The crows not only hatch them with their own but also rear the young ones. When they are ready and are able to fly, all that a koel does is to let out her haunting and infectious calls near them continuously and then nature takes over. Hearing this rallying call, the young koels may be one or two in a brood, get restless and then unceremoniously and ungratefully leave their parental nests and their foster parents and go and join their own crows.

Here is a phenomenon where the koel acts as a parasite and the most amusing part of the joke is that it has chosen the crow as its host, proverbially the most cunning amongst birds.

David Altaf,
Meerut, U.P.

ON THE ALLEGED INFERIORITY OF THE SOUTHERN GRACKLE
/GRACULA RELIGIOSA INDICA (CUVIER)/ AS A TALKING
BIRD

I had often wondered about the truth and/or explanation of the common assertion, and rooted belief, that Pahari Mynas coming from the Himalayan foothills and Chota Nagpur make better talkers and are more easily taught than the smaller South Indian birds. They certainly command ridiculously higher prices from bird fanciers on that excuse. There seemed no biological reason why this should be so considering that, despite their recognition as geographical races, the populations represent little more than a continuous cline.

A fact brought out in a recent conversation with Mr. K.I. Mathew, the State Wildlife Officer of Kerala, suggests a possible explanation for the alleged difference in the learning and talking abilities of northern and southern birds. According to Mr. Mathew, in Kerala these mynas (G. r. indica) are normally captured with bird lime when the common forest shrub Helicteres isora is flowering gregariously, attracting large flocks to feed on the nectar. The majority of South Indian grackles are caught as adults in this way, and it is thus understandable why they do not learn to talk so readily. However, some of the birds do learn quite well, and I suggested that perhaps these belonged to the small minority that is taken as nestlings and hand-reared. Mr. Mathew confirmed that fledglings taken from the nest did in fact learn to talk quite proficiently.

As against adult-caught South Indian birds, the bulk of those that come from the Gorakhpur area of U.P., and eastern and northern central India -- which enjoy a special reputation as good talkers -- have been taken from the nest and reared in captivity; therefore more acclimatized to human company and readily learning to reproduce human speech and other sophisticated noises.

While on the ornithological survey of Orissa in 1950 I learnt that the Forest Department of the State auctioned the rights for collecting hill myna nestlings, along with other minor forest produce, levying a royalty of four annas (= 25 n.P.) per bird. The total revenue from this source came to about Rs3000/- annually, thus representing a legal take of some 12,000 nest-

lings. How many more vanished in the process of collecting and accounting was not recorded; neither was the effect of this annual drain on the Pahari Myna population assessed.

Salim Ali

A YOUNG KINGFISHER'S GREED LEADING TO DEATH

During the third week of May a neighbour brought me a full-grown Whitebreasted Kingfisher (with the pale-tipped dark brown bill of a juvenile) which he had rescued from a flock of crows. He had found the kingfisher on the ground, half dead and being pecked by crows. The long tail of a medium-sized garden lizard (Calotes) projected from the gape of the kingfisher, dangling like a monstrous tongue. I found that the bird was still breathing, though the eyes were closed by the white nictitating membrane. It was clear that the bird had greedily gobbled up a lizard whose body length was hardly less than its own. Thinking after a time the stomach juices would act on the lizard and that the bird would recover, I left it in an empty parrot cage after dashing a handful of water on it. Two hours later the bird sat up when touched and opened its eyes. Confident that it was on the way to full recovery, I let it alone. At 6 p.m. however it was found dead.

There was a patch of naked skin on one side of the neck and the gullet appeared swollen. I thought that the crows had plucked the feathers of that side, but the skin was found to be intact.

K. K. Neelakantan
Ernakulam, Kerala State

MIGRATION OF THE BLUECHECKED BEE-EATER MEROPS SUPERCILIOSUS

I have come across these birds in many different areas. In Saurashtra we caught a few in mist nets during the BNHS/WHO Bird Migration Study Project camps; in Bombay they are occasionally seen behind Juhu Beach. In the Kolaba District of Maharashtra they are found in the cold weather both near the sea coast and near the inland creeks in the interior. In almost all cases their far-carrying calls te-tew, te-tew have given me the first warning of the presence of these birds.

On the morning of 23rd May I was having my morning swim at Juhu when I heard the calls of these birds overhead. Without my spectacles I could not see anything except a blur but the call was unmistakable. Several birds seemed to be going in a NW. direction. Curiously the same night at about 10 p.m. when I was reading in bed I heard the call of these birds overhead. I rushed out into the garden. It was a cloudy though moonlit night, and even with my spectacles this time I could not see the birds. But the te-tew, te-tew continued for some time and the birds seemed to be going in the same direction that I had noticed that morning.

According to Ripley's A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN these birds breed from North Africa, Israel, and Iran south to Egypt, Iraq, and East Africa and east to India. R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji found these birds nesting in Saurashtra a few years ago.

Zafer Futehally

HABITAT AND MIGRATION

If you ramble along a forest road, observant, or take a short-cut across field and mango tope, or rest at a seat in a park or in your garden, or merely open your window to have a look at the tracery of leaf and branches formed therein you will surely get a peep at Indian Birdland. Though so close, it is a foreign land. Except for a few leading types like the crow and the myna, the majority of the inhabitants of Indian Birdland are strangers to you. Of the 2500 different clans and tribes, you may not be able to recognize more than a dozen, though at least a hundred different bird-forms can be seen where human beings live.

Once curiosity has been aroused about these close neighbours, you may find their land one of mystery and wonder. Indian Birdland is a country by itself, with the population still uncounted (as distinct from unclassified) with a definite system of economy which, though it affects human living, is only vaguely understood, and manners and customs so quaint and picturesque that you could not say they were those of your closest neighbours. The birds constantly are seen flitting from one tree to another engaged in vocations very similar to those of humans and calling for a great deal of craftsmanship. The tools these feathered artisans use are very specialised ones; they court and love their mates, have various manners of housekeeping, and rearing their children; and their foods have a bearing on human economy and a similarity to human morsels; they change their dress, and use a 'language'. Few humans have any idea of the variety that prevails in Indian Birdland.

Birds are to be found wherever there are plants in India and Pakistan. There are types that burrow down to 11 feet into the earth, go to a hundred feet below the surface of the sea, and fly over 29,000 feet above sea level. Having a history as long as 130 million years, Indian birds are not affected by the course of human politics, and violate many human political frontiers! Much of India and Pakistan have the same bird types, and as many as 500 of our birds winter here from the Arctic cold of Siberia. They fly across frontiers, without bothering about passports and custom duties, save what they dearly pay as a result of human shootings.

Indian Birdland, known to zoogeographers as the Oriental Region, juts out as a peninsula from the main zoogeographical continent of the Palaearctic Region extending from Britain to Japan. The peninsular characters are most intense in an area south of an arc connecting the Bay of Bengal and the Rann of Kutch, passing obliquely through Narayanganj, Rajmahal, Delhi, and Agra. In this area Ceylon is a separate Province, while Assam and Burma to the east form one sub-division. This peninsular sub-division is connected to the Palaearctic Region by the Indo-Gangetic Plain and the Himalayas.

These five primary divisions of Indian Birdland can be divided into various secondary and tertiary sub-divisions on the basis of the annual rainfall and temperature in each. These factors affect the character of the vegetation, and through vegetation the types and kinds of birds to be found. Birds subsist on plants, and the distribution of birds over an area varies with their respective food supply. Their environment has variations other than those depending on changes in topography and climate. In an area with the same topography and climate there may be forests, agricultural fields, pastures, groves, gardens and

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And any one of these habitats can be further sub-divided. In the forests of SW. India it is possible to describe about eight storeys of plant growth, one on the top of the other, with a special bird fauna to each.

In these variations of habitat are hidden the surprises that Indian Birdland holds. However small your range of activity, and the territory over which you watch birds, the knowing of birds and their habits will be an unending source of wonder and pleasure. Even if you do not have the patience for birdwatching, or cannot afford more time than for occasional peeps at Indian Birdland, the surprises and the pleasures will not be the fewer if you have the correct angle for those peeps, know what to look for, and where and when.

(Mrs.) Janal Ara

BIRDWATCHING AROUND RAJKOT

So far as I have found out there are two good places for birdwatching around Rajkot, viz. Lalpuri Lake and the River Aji -- downstream off Central Jail. I have come to know by personal experience that a visit to either of these places is always rewarding. As is evident, mostly waders and water birds are met with here. Both of these places are so rich in avifauna especially from October to March that it is very common to see about 25 to 30 different species without moving much around. I have never returned disappointed from the excursions to these two places. I cannot say this about other places in or about Rajkot. Lalpuri Lake has therefore now become a favourite haunt for some of the members of the local birdwatcher's club.

Below are given the impressions of my several visits to these two places, sometimes alone, and sometimes in company with other members of the local club.

Flamingos are of course a great attraction. These flying roses of Nature are a delight to behold. Occasionally we have counted sixty to seventy of them within the range of my fieldglasses (7 x 35). Many more could be judged on the opposite side but beyond the effective range of the glasses. I first saw these curiously lovely birds at Bhavnagar seacoast. It was a pleasure for me to have them here at Rajkot up to my last visit to Lalpuri Lake on 5 May 1963.

Both the species of Godwits, i.e. Blacktailed as well as Bartailed have been seen on the lake, the latter only once and a single specimen. Twice or thrice Blacktailed Godwits were seen quarrelling (?) on the near-by Raudarda Lake. They were hopping facing each other, crouching, then leaping and seizing the bill of the other. This continued for some time. Then one of them used to fly away. Of the two thus seen, one had the foreneck and breast rufous.

Whenever I see and identify a new species I do get delighted. This may prove that I am still in the initial stage of birdwatching hobby. But then, this is what it is and I admit it, I was particularly elated when I identified the Pheasant-tailed Jacana on my first visit on Lalpuri Lake. It was in a non-breeding costume at that time. Some of them have now put on their wedding dress.

The flash of shining green head, neck, and speculum of the Shoveller, when the rays of the sun fall upon it at a favourable angle, is quite an unforgettable sight. We were not fortunate enough to see the Shoveller more than once in spite of our keenness

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The flash of shining green head, neck, and speculum of the Shoveller, when the rays of the sun fall upon it at a favourable angle, is quite an unforgettable sight. We were not fortunate enough to see the Shoveller more than once in spite of our keenness to spot it. Among other such VIP's (!) come the Brahmany Kite,

the Demoiselle Crane, the Bartailed Godwit, and the Pintail.

The Spoonbills gathered together in a solemn congregation were always seen dozing on every of our afternoon and evening visits to the Lake. The Spotbills also were hardly seen active. They rested near the edge of water in two's and three's.

The Whiskered Terns, which were available only in smaller numbers on our former visits to the Lake, were in great number -- at least more than 50 -- on my last visit on 5.5.1963. They were delicately and deftly picking up some white little lumps (as seen through the fieldglasses) apparently from the vegetable growth in the water. Their graceful figure and flight pinpoint-ed our eyes upon them. Some of them were sitting on the bank near water.

Are the Whiskered Terns mischievous? I saw some of them harassing or teasing a Great Stone Curlew, which was standing alone and a little away from other waders, Spoonbills and Herons, and Egrets. The Whiskered Tern circled overhead of that quiet gentleman and dived upon it. The poor thing had to take recourse to swift footwork to avoid the attack of that bully, the Whiskered Tern.

The Purple Coot has favoured the downstream portion of the waste weir of the Lalpuri Lake. Every time we went to the place, one, two, or three could be seen. But on 5 May a stately procession of eight members was seen winding its way sometimes through the reeds and sometimes in the open on the edge of the water.

On our earlier visits the Dabchick was not seen. But later on it made its appearance first not on the Lake itself but downstream of the waste weir. On 5 May many were visible on the gradually drying waters of the Lake.

One thing which attracted our attention was the gradually decreasing numbers of the migratory birds such as Shanks, Ruff-Reeve, Sandpipers, Swallows, Terns, Ducks, Stints, Plovers, Godwits, etc., etc. after 31 March 1963.

The Common Coots which virtually ruled the Lake on their numerical strength, were sadly depleted in numbers -- hardly five were on water where they were more than a hundred before.

The portion of the Aji river mentioned in the first paragraph is comparatively convenient for observing especially the waders from close quarters. K.S. Lavkumar considers this portion of the river admirably suitable for netting operations.

Lalsinh M. Raol,
Rajkot

JYNX TORQUILLA HIMALAYANA IN ROORKEE, U.P

The Wryneck appears to be a regular winter visitor to Roorkee. Mrs. Dinesh Mohan has seen the bird in her garden during the past few seasons. There were two birds this winter and I had the opportunity to have a close look at one of these birds. It was feeding on the lawn, and/the bright morning sunshine I noticed that its flanks and lower breast were beautifully vermiculated. In fact the whole breast and lower parts that were visible appeared to be barred. This agrees with the description of Jynx torquilla himalayana quoted by Mrs. Usha Ganguli in the

Newsletter for April 1963, and with the illustration in Vaurie's paper which I was able to see through her kindness.

Mrs. Dinesh Mohan has recorded the date of departure of the Wryneck from Roorkee this year as 20 April.

Joseph George,
Roorke, U.P.

REVIEWS

SILENT SPRING. By Rachel Carson. pp. 304. London 1963. Hamish Hamilton. Price 25s.

Most of us are aware of the close and vital connection that exists between all living things in this world. Those of us who are in constant or even casual touch with nature can never forget the existence of this 'intimate web of life', while those who stay under artificial conditions behind brick and mortar, may perhaps forget for a while how dependent they are for their existence on the unseen forces of nature. After reading SILENT SPRING one can never slip back into the infantile belief that man can manipulate his environment as he wishes, without also taking into account the requirements of other forms of life around him. He may be the dominating influence on the earth today but it is becoming obvious that he must learn to co-exist with all the lowlier creatures of the world, and if he thinks of exterminating them he will set off a chain reaction which will exterminate the human species as well.

Rachel Carson's book deals principally with the effects, the ghastly effects of synthetic chemicals on various forms of life. When DDT was discovered in 1939 by Paul Muller, it was thought that a major victory was won by man against his insect enemies. Muller was awarded the Nobel Prize. The soldiers battling in various corners of the world got some relief for they were now able to keep the insect pests at bay with the help of DDT sprays. But this discovery was to lead to fearful consequences. Since 1939 hundreds of insecticides, pesticides, and herbicides have been marketed and the net result in many cases has been that while the chemicals have been unsuccessful in exterminating the pest, they have brought calamitous side results in their wake. For instance:

(1) since the introduction of DDT a superior race of resistant insects have developed, which cannot be exterminated by the existing chemicals. To kill them by these means would involve producing even more deadly chemicals, with even more dangerous effects all round.

(2) Gene mutations occur as a result of insect sprays.

(3) The chlorinated hydrocarbons, and organic phosphorous insecticides are all built on the basis of carbon atoms. These get stored in our systems and subsequently are subject to biological magnification.

It has been found that an original spray of the concentration of 1/10 of 1 part per million (which is a safe limit) results in a storage of 15 parts per million -- a hundredfold increase. This happens because of the interaction of one chemical on another, and the biological process itself is unpredictable in its effects. Sometimes it has been found that water sprayed with DDT resulted in the formation of 2, 4-D by the action of sun, air and water in the open basin. Heptachlor, Dieldrin, Aldrin, Endrin are the main culprits, and in England an awakened public is now using these chemicals with great circums-

The effect of these chemicals on birds has been too tragic for words. Literally thousands have died the most painful death in recent years as a result of eating insects or seeds, or fish which contained traces of these death dealing chemicals. In Clear Lake in California anglers were apparently bothered by the gnat Chasborus astictopus. To save them from this annoyance DDT was sprayed in the ratio of 1/50 per million. Seven assaults were made on the gnat population. Very soon serious consequences ensued. Clear Lake has traditionally been a breeding area of the Western Grebes, and is also the winter quarters of visiting birds of this species. The birds were attracted here because of the abundant fish of the lake. It is a bird of spectacular appearance and beguiling habits, building its floating nests in shallow lakes of western United States and Canada. It is called the 'Swan Grebe' with reason for it glides with scarcely a ripple across the lake surface, the body riding low, while neck and shining black head held high. The newly hatched chick is clothed in soft grey down; in only a few hours it takes to the water and rides on the back of the father or mother nestled under the parental wing coverts. After the DDT treatment a large number of birds started to die, and when their tissues were analysed they were found loaded with DDT in the extraordinary concentration of 1600 parts per million. The poison obviously picked up initially by the smallest organisms was transferred to the predators: from plankton to plant-eating fishes, to carnivorous fishes, and to the birds. Miss Carson warns that at the opposite end of the food chain man himself is involved.

At the end of the book, the author gives a list of the Principal Sources. This runs into 50 pages. One would have thought that putting into one book the erudition of such a vast bibliography would make it heavy reading. But almost every page contains fascinating examples supporting the theory which has been propounded. In the chapter on 'Earth's Green Mantle' the author writes about the two-way relationship between the sage bush and the sage grouse. 'The sage is all things to these birds of the plains. The low sage of the foothill ranges shelters their nests and their young; the denser growths are loafing and roosting areas; at all times the sage provides the staple food of the grouse. Yet it is a two-way relationship. The spectacular courtship displays of the cocks help to loosen the soil beneath and around the sage aiding invasion by grasses which grow in the shelter of the sagebrush'. These grasses together with the sage provide valuable grazing for cattle and the pronghorn antelope. But the destruction of the sage bush by herbicides, in the misguided attempt to convert it into grassland seems to have been a ruinous enterprise. Man has yet to learn that he cannot impudently upset the ecological balance of a particular area at will.

So far we have dealt only with the grimmer aspects of the author's thesis. But it is not as if man has always behaved foolishly or that there is no way of dealing effectively with a hostile environment. In the final chapter of the book entitled 'The Other Road', Miss Carson reviews what has been achieved by biological controls. Spectacular results have been achieved in various fields. Twentyfive years ago, Dr. Edward Knipling of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Entomology Research Branch, suggested that if it were possible to sterilize and release a large number of insects, the males would compete successfully with the normal wild males, only infertile eggs would be produced and the population would be severely curtailed. In 1954 a full scale experiment was tried against Screw Worms, which cause an annual loss of as much as \$20,000,000 in the south-eastern states of the U.S. The experiment was a complete success and in

in some places the Screw Worm has been completely eradicated. Many examples are given of how by maintaining the ecological balance of a habitat, no pest can overstep its bounds.

In the Preface to the book Julian Huxley says 'Cuckoos have become quite scarce owing to caterpillars -- their staple diet -- being killed. Song-birds are suffering from shortage of insect and worm food as well as from the poisoning of what is left. Country hedgerows and road verges and meadows are losing their lovely and familiar flowers. In fact as my brother Aldous said after reading Rachel Carson's book, we are losing half the subject matter of English poetry.'

Let us earnestly hope that mankind will follow 'The Other Road' which has been recommended in SILENT SPRING.

-(Z.F.)

* * * *

ADVENTURE LIT THEIR STAR. By Kenneth Allsop. pp.xi+222. Illustrated by Antony Smith. London 1963. Macdonald. Price 18s.

There have been novels before where the central figures have been birds. KESTREL KLEE, by Kenneth Richmond, and Paul Gallie's classic THE SNOW GOOSE have both been outstandingly successful novels which have managed to please literary critics as well as ornithologists. Kenneth Allsop's fastidiously written story about the Little Ringed Plover joins this particular group of novels which are most keenly enjoyed and understood by bird-lovers.

The novel opens with a magnificent description of a large mixed flock of migrants as it approaches the English coast. 'A main run was of swifts, long, thick herds of them, whose narrow wings carried them at an unwavering seventy miles an hour through the cold air. They sped in silent dark squadrons, beak to tail, overtaking weaker-winged birds logging with exhaustion.' The casualties as the packed migration force dips towards the rocky coast on a stormy April night is shockingly wasteful; but among the survivors is a pair of Little Ringed Plovers who have come to England for the first time to breed.

The rest of the slow moving evocative but never boring book is a description of their efforts to establish themselves and to raise a family in semi-urban England. The birds are never humanized and the writing is scrupulously unsentimental. The only human characters brought in are a couple of birdwatchers and one egg collector. Readers will be glad to know that the Little Ringed Plover's ultimate success in raising a family is due in part to their alert helpfulness of the birdwatchers.

The slight tenuous thread of the story is based on fact. The Little Ringed Plover was first found breeding in Britain in the immediate post war years; its numbers have since grown, and it has now its own place among the species which breed in Britain. Kenneth Allsop was an official of the Middle Thames Natural History Society when the first pair of the Little Ringed Plovers were observed breeding in the outskirts of London, in 1944. His book based as it is on first hand observation is written with an almost documentary accuracy.

The drawings of Anthony Smith have a pleasant, angular style. They are often impressionistic illustrations of the habitat rather than careful bird studies, and they convey very well the spirit of the book, which is a binocular lens view of bird life in a setting which is dominated by human activities.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Our Library

The books that we have received either for review from publishers or as gifts from friends have so far benefitted only the Editor. This is obviously unfair, and subscribers are most welcome to send for any of the following books. The condition is that they must be sent securely packed and the cost of the postage both ways will have to be borne by them. To date the following volumes have been received.

NIDIFICATION OF BIRDS OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE. By Stuart Baker
(All four volumes)

THE BIRDS OF INDIA. By T.C. Jerdon

ADVENTURE LIT THEIR STAR. By Kenneth Allsop (1962)

COLLINS GUIDE TO BIRD WATCHING. By R.S.F. Fitter (1963)

THE MIGRATIONS OF BIRDS. By Jean Dorst (1962)

A BIRD PHOTOGRAPHER IN INDIA. By E.H.N. Lowther (1949)

The Ring magazine received in exchange

Mr. Samir Sen, F.Z.S., who set the ball rolling by sending in the four volumes of NIDIFICATION OF BIRDS OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE has now informed us that a case of books has been forwarded to us for our library. The consignment is eagerly awaited and the contents will be announced in the next issue.

CORRESPONDENCE

Painted Partridge in Rajasthan

Mr. R.N. Chatterjee is quite right about the wide occurrence of this bird in Rajasthan and I am rather surprised how Sri S.C. Sharma missed it. (Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 5)

I am a resident of Ajmer and for last 20 years I have shot this bird regularly between Sarwar and Kekri on Nasirabad Deoli-Kota Road and before me my uncle who was a Tehsildar at Kekri. This bird is commonly found in Kota, Bondi, Deoli and many other places. I have not yet seen one near Pishkar, though I have shot quite a lot in that area also.

The area I am talking about near Kekri has no water channels but is more or less red kankar country with small prickly shrubs. The partridge can be seen on both sides and on the road itself, feeding on cowdung in the evenings and mornings.

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A. David

Birds at Devlali

At Devlali I saw some boys with shot guns and slings trying to shoot at innocent mynas. This place abounds in mynas, bulbuls, koels and many other birds which I could not identify on the spot. However, after referring to Salim Ali's book on my return to Bombay I could identify the other birds as follows: Grey Tits, Indian Robins, Magpie Robin, Ashy Wren Warbler, Brahminy Myna, Stone Curlew, and Brahminy Kite.

I saw the Robins in large numbers near our house. I also saw the Brahminy Myna for the first time. I could not identify the smaller birds.

B.A. Palkhiwalla
May 29, 1963

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Bird Keeping

I have been getting your Newsletter for Birdwatchers regularly and I find them interesting, particularly the March issue which gives 'Calls of various Birds' on p. 11.

I am however more interested in keeping birds as pets than to watch them which also I do and recognize them. I have been keeping birds for many years, and at present I have Goldfronted Chloropsis which are the best song birds and mimics. I have also a Golden Oriole for the last so many years which sings regularly during the present season. I have also had Laughing Thrush, (Brown with white topce), Himalayan Whistling Thrush, Magpie Robin, Pekin Robins, Blue Robins, and Bhutia Bulbuls. As you may be knowing Meerut is a very big market for birds which are exported to foreign countries. I have had too many of them and could not look after them, as it becomes a whole time job, so I advertised. A Russian couple bought a pair of Chloropsis for taking them to Moscow.

I have also had Goldfinch, Greenfinch, and other seed eating birds, budgerigars, etc. If you happen to come to Delhi I shall be pleased to see you. I would take you to Meerut where you will be surprised to see variety of birds which they sell and breed.

P. Edalji,

New Delhi

[I hope the Game Laws are properly observed by the persons concerned. -- Ed.]

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Birdwatching in Valparai

Valparai is a place in the Anamalais (S. India) situated about 3500 ft. above mean sea level.

The most common bird here is the Redwhiskered Bulbul. There are practically no crows and I have not yet seen any sparrows. Even the Redvented bulbuls are not common. Twice I came across the grackles (hill mynas). Once I saw them on a tree by the side of a bridge busy eating a kind of fig.

I saw the Malabar Whistling Thrush once. The shining blue shoulders are very beautiful. Early morning its sweet whistle is heard repeatedly.

On 8th evening an Emerald Dove flew past me at top speed.

I have learnt from local people that a white bird with a long tail is seen here frequently. Could it be the Paradise Flycatcher?

Master Shahulhameed
Valparai, Coimbatore,
11.3.63

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 August



NEWSLETTER
FOR
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Vol. 3, No. 8

August 1963

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HOW BIRDS FLY

Introductory:

It is generally supposed that birds fly by pushing the air downwards and backwards with their wings. The reaction of pushing the air downwards is supposed to push the bird upwards and the reaction of pushing the air backwards is, likewise, supposed to push the bird forwards.

After the down stroke, the wings have to be returned to the upward - forward position. In doing so, the bird must, naturally, fall downwards and go backwards. Even if the bird succeeds in partially folding its wings, the upstroke will have to be considered a negative stroke. Anybody who has seen a bird fly will agree that this sort of inefficiency is incompatible with not only bird flight but with entire nature.

Some people have compared bird flight with a man rowing a boat. The oarsman can lift the blade out of the water or feather the blade for the return stroke. Whereas the boat skims over the surface of the water, the bird is completely immersed in the air in which it moves. This is a big difference. The bird also can feather its wings on the upstroke and except for this similarity between boat and bird, the entire comparison is not correct.

Even in rowing a boat, less will be achieved if the water is actually pushed back to any extent. In fact, the less the turbulence created, the greater the efficiency. The bird indeed proceeds through the air very neatly, without creating any turbulence.

In this discussion an effort will be made to show that bird flight is fundamentally akin to the flight of a twin engined aircraft, using contra-rotating airscrews. Jet propelled birds are not known, although the squids of the ocean are so equipped.

The Paper Kite:

- .. A flat plate, like a paper kite, when inclined to the direction of motion and moved horizontally, rises vertically. In still air, the kite has to be pulled along quite vigorously. With a stiff breeze, however, the kite is held steadily by its string, while the breeze does the needful. In either case, it is the relative motion of the kite with respect to the air that matters.

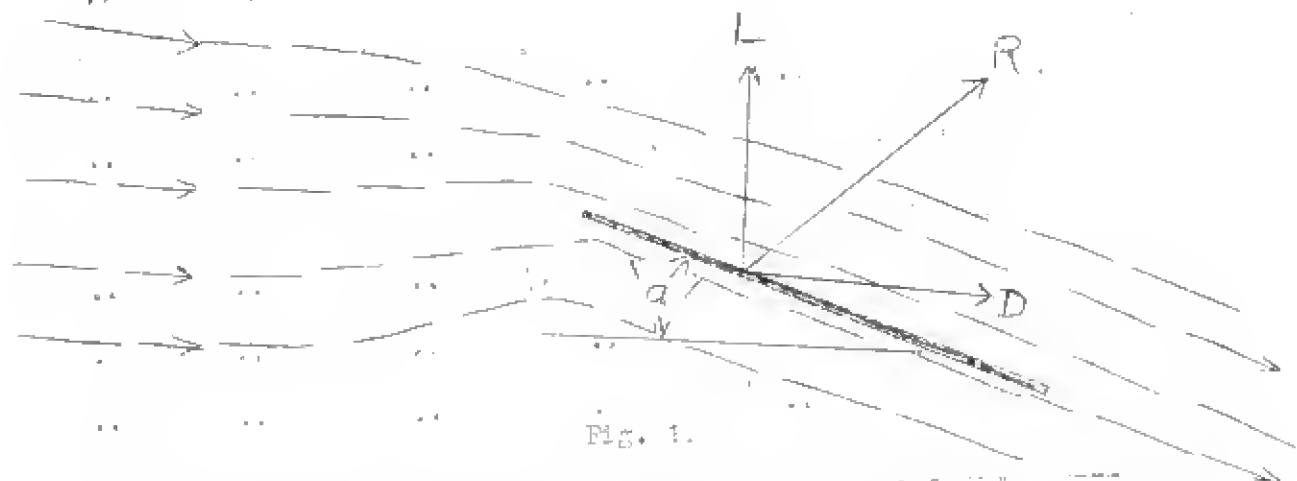


Fig. 1.

- .. Fig. 1 shows a paper kite in an air stream. It will be seen that the air impinging on the lower surface, is diverted downwards. This produces an upward reaction. Also, it will be noticed that the streamlines of air are crowded together at the front of the upper surface. This means that a given volume of air, as represented by each streamline, has to pass through a narrower space. This can only be achieved by the air stream increasing in speed. It is a well-known law that speed of a fluid increases at the cost of pressure and vice versa. Therefore, there is a decrease in pressure at the portion where the streamlines come close together. This in turn has the effect of sucking the kite upwards.

Both the pressure from below and the suction from above act at right angles to the surface of the kite. In addition, due to the skin friction of the air passing over the surface, the kite is being pushed backwards. The resultant of these forces is shown by the vector R in the figure.

This force R can be analysed into two forces; L or lift which is always at right angles to the undisturbed air stream and D or drag in the direction of the air stream. Lift and drag should not be referred to as vertical and horizontal forces because later on it will be seen that the air stream is not always horizontal.

- .. The angle 'a' at which the kite is inclined to the undisturbed air flow is known as the angle of attack.

The Aerofoil:

As the angle of attack of a kite is increased, the lift and drag increase but soon a limit is reached when turbulence is created on the upper surface, the drag becomes enormous, the lift becomes negligible and the kite comes down. Fig. 2 shows a body of aerofoil shape situated in the same manner as the flat plate in Fig. 1.

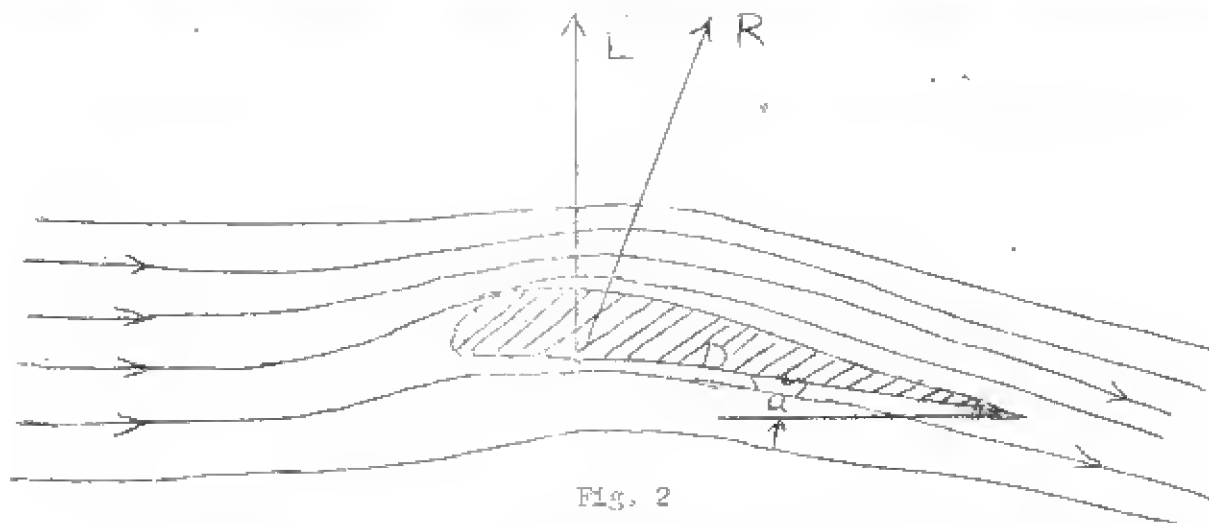


Fig. 2

It will be noticed in Fig. 2 that there is great crowding of streamlines in the forward part of the upper surface. This leads to great speeding up of the air streams, with consequent loss of pressure and enhanced suction. The lift is large and the drag is small. As the angle of attack is increased, the lift increases steadily and the drag slightly. At an angle of attack of about 4 degrees the lift may be 25 times the value of the drag. Both lift and drag increase till the angle of attack is 15 degrees or more before turbulence and stalling take place.

Even with a negative angle of attack of -2 degrees the lift has a small positive value. Aerofoils may be of many shapes, some with very high values for lift to enable large weights to be supported, even at low air speeds and some of such a section as to afford minimum drag at extremely high air speeds.

Within reasonable limits, a bird can alter the camber or curvature of the upper surface of its wing and thus change its aerodynamical properties. The bird can also change the angle of attack. This may easily be observed when an egret comes in to land in shallow water. The bird glides down slowly and using the wings as an air brake, touches down with hardly a ripple.

The powerful suction on the cambered surface of an aerofoil can be demonstrated in the following way. An ordinary teaspoon is gently held, suspended by the handle, and the back of the spoon (approximates to aerofoil shape) is brought in contact with a jet of water from a water tap. See Fig. 3. It will be noticed that the spoon is drawn towards the jet of water and not thrown off as might be expected.

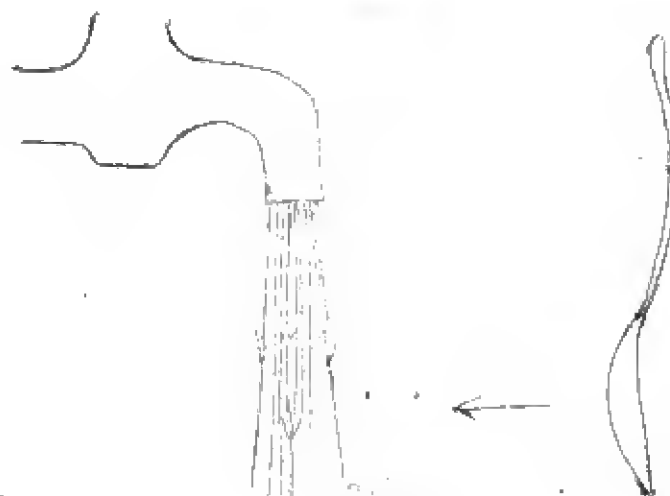


Fig. 3.

From the above observations, it will be seen that a bird has to merely spread out its wings, which are of aerofoil shape, and hold them at a suitable angle of attack. As soon as the bird is propelled forward against the air, it gets airborne. How the bird succeeds in propelling itself forward will be discussed in the next chapter.

Propulsion:-

Two Parts of Wing:

For the purpose of analysis the bird wing is considered to have two parts. The portion of the wing from the shoulder to the wrist, corresponding to the upper arm and fore arm in us, is one part. The portion of the wing, corresponding to our hand with fingers, is the other part. The secondary feathers are attached to the fore arm and the primaries to the hand.

When the wings are spread out, and the bird is propelled forward at reasonable speed, the portion of the wing from shoulder to wrist, or inner part, is sufficient to provide enough lift to sustain the bird in flight. This allows the primaries or outer part to be used for another function - propulsion.

The Airscrew:

Fig. 4 depicts the blade of an airscrew as it starts to rotate in the direction shown. To start with, the angle of attack is very large. The lift OL which is always at right angles to the direction of motion, is therefore forward. This force naturally draws the aircraft forward.

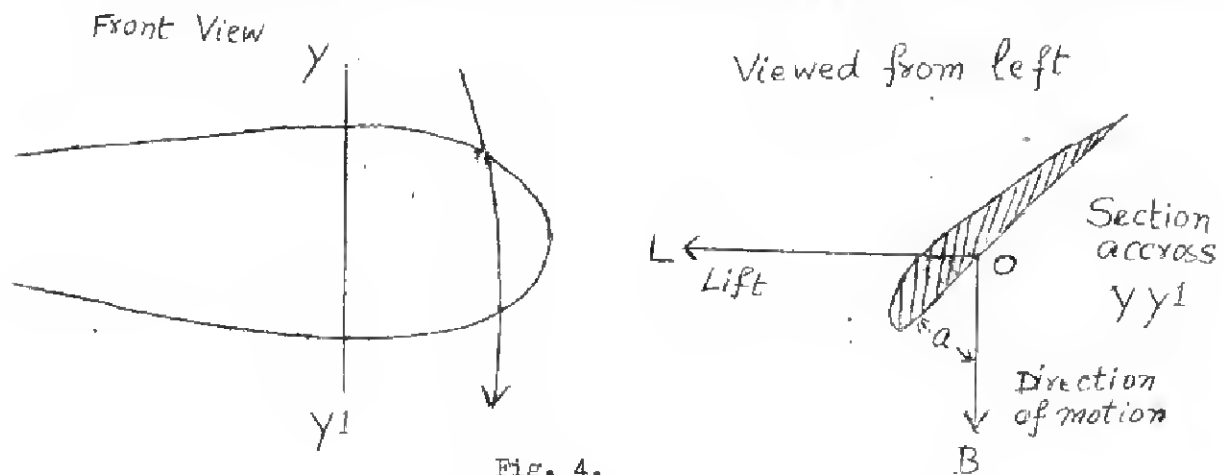


Fig. 4.

Fig. 5 shows the same section of the blade, after the aircraft has started to move forward. The direction of motion of the blade section is a combination of the downward rotating motion OB and the forward motion of the aircraft OA and is represented by the resultant OR .

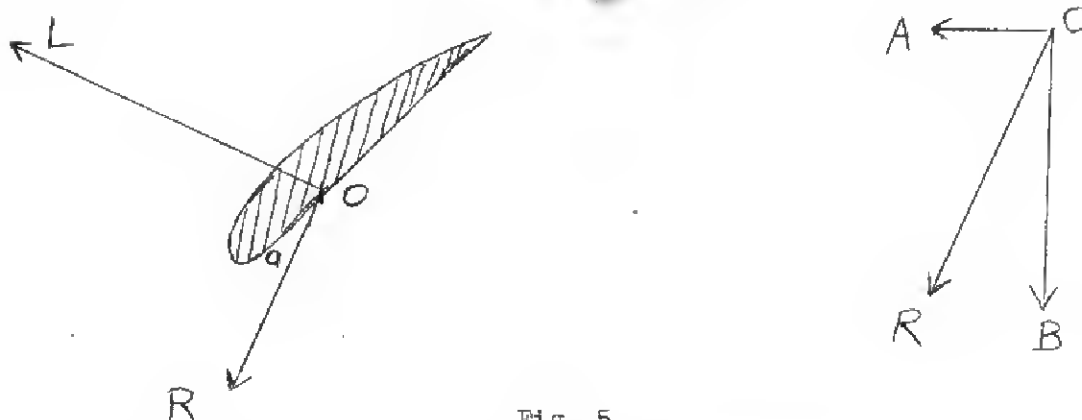


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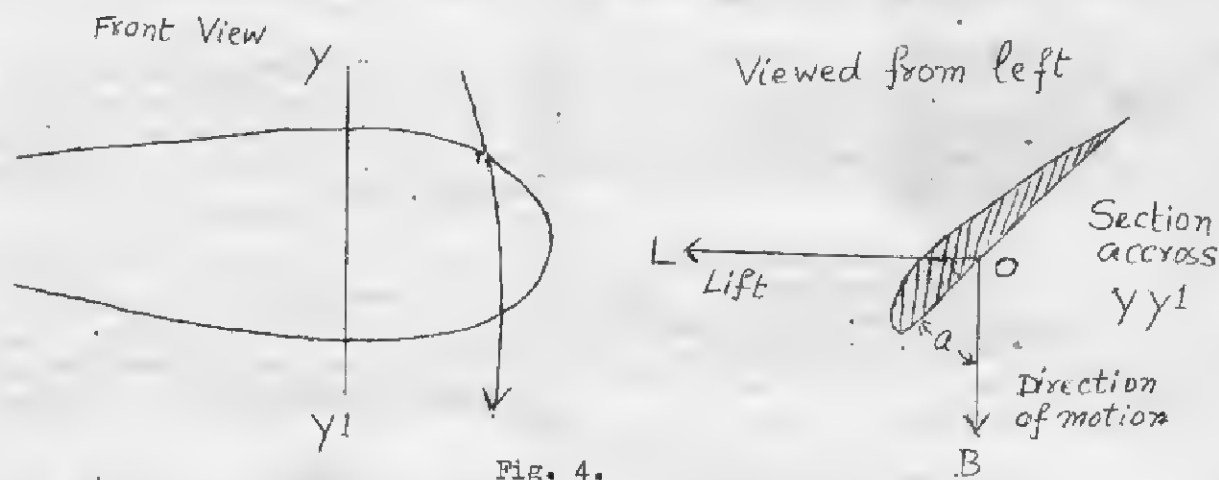


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Fig. 5.

It will be noticed that the angle of attack is smaller and more conducive to efficiency. As the aircraft gains more speed, the pitch of the blade will have to be changed to present a suitable angle of attack. In other words, an automatic device is incorporated to twist

the blade of the airscrew.

Left Wing of Bird:

The airscrew blade shown in Fig. 4 & Fig. 5 corresponds to the outer portion of the left wing of a bird as it appears during the down-beat when viewed from the left.

As the bird gains forward speed, the wing tip is twisted to an angle which is more horizontal, as shown in Fig. 6.

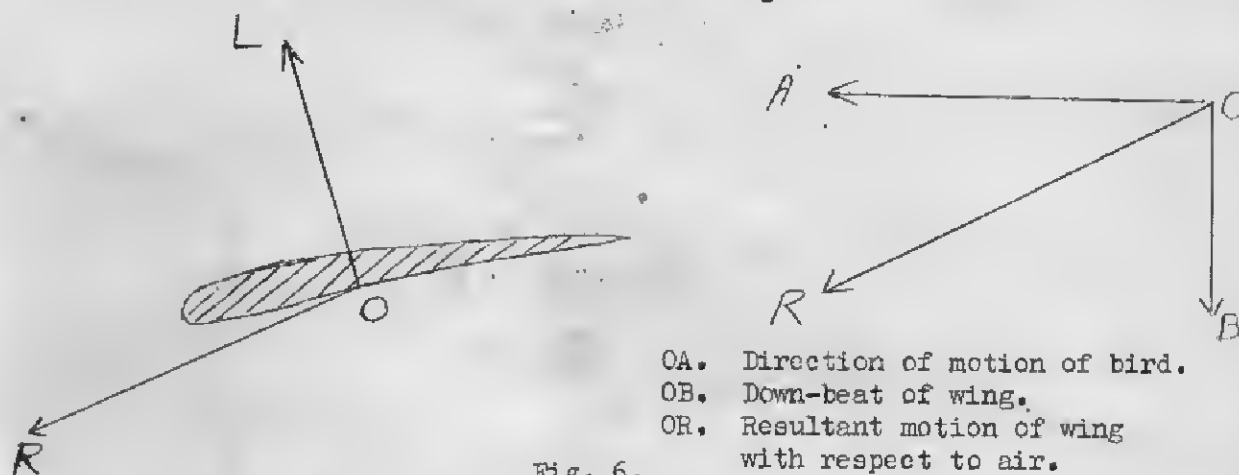


Fig. 6.

The lift OL is forward and upwards.

The Up-Beat of the Wing:

If the airscrew blade, on arriving at the lowest position, were to twist itself, as to completely reverse its pitch and rotate upwards, it would behave like a bird wing. The camber of the aerofoil would be wrong. The bird wing on the other hand, can do exactly this and, being flexible, can maintain a more suitable camber, as shown in Fig. 7.

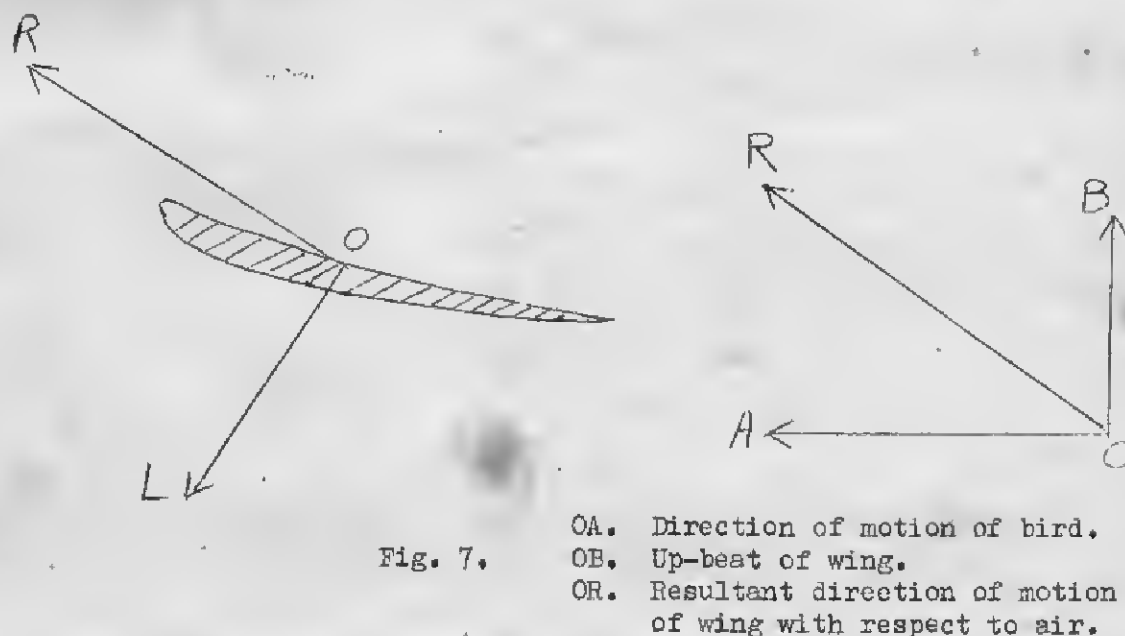


Fig. 7.

The lift OL is forward and downwards.

The right wing of the bird is a mirror image of the left wing and behaves in exactly the same way. By both wings being beaten downwards or upwards at the same time, the bird is able to maintain itself on an even keel.

It has been shown in Figs. 6 & 7 that, both during the down-beat and during the up-beat, there is a forward component to the lift (lift is not vertically upwards but at right angles to relative motion).

So, all that a bird has to do is to beat its wings up and down, twisting the primaries slightly at the end of each stroke, to present a suitable positive angle of attack, and it is propelled forward. See Fig. 8.

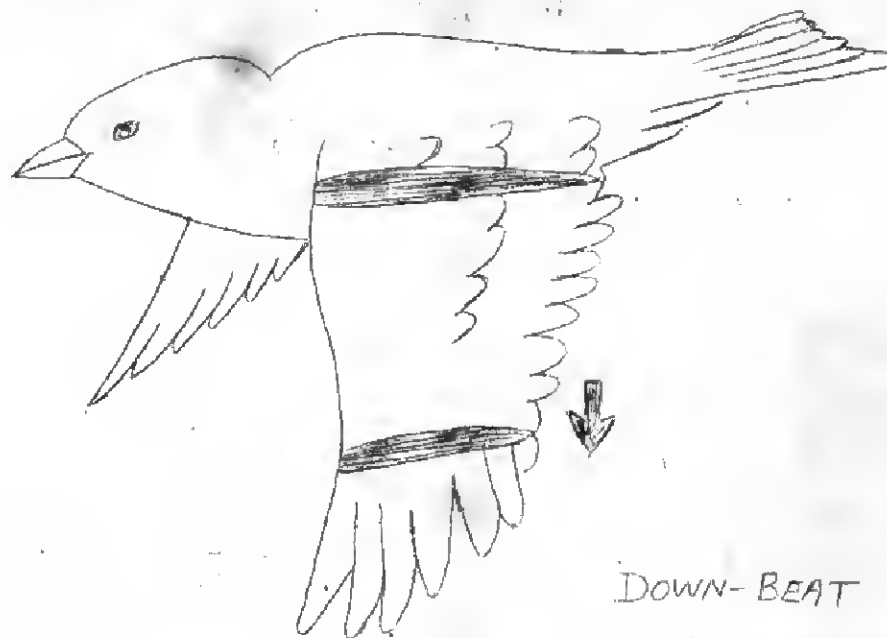


Fig. 8.

It will be noticed that about half the primaries in most birds, grow in an outward direction, which enables these feathers to be twisted with great effect.

An exact division between inner and outer portions of the wing does not exist. In fact, there is a gradual merger of the two portions. Observation, of bird flight, will show that not only the wing tips, but the entire wing is flapped up and down. However, the up and down velocity of the inner portion, nearest the shoulder, is negligible in comparison to the forward velocity of the bird.

The maximum up and down velocity can exist only at the wing tips and even here its value is less than the forward velocity of the bird. If this point is remembered, and a vector diagram drawn to scale, it will be seen that the wing does not have to be twisted much from the horizontal plane.

Actual Observation of Flight:

The above principles can be observed only in the flight of large birds, whose wing movements are slow enough to be followed with the eye. The flight of egrets, kites and gulls, especially gulls, is most fascinating to watch. The twisting down of the leading edge of the wing on the down-beat and the twisting up on the up-beat, can be noticed, when the bird is flying in level with the eye and across the line of vision.

S. V. Nilakanta

* * *
THE NESTING HABITS OF THE PURPLE SUNBIRD

Reference the note in the Newsletter of June 1963 on Purple Sunbirds nesting within spiders' nests. Through the kindness of Col. Baljit Singh I have had the opportunity of examining two of the nests preserved by him. The condition actually seems to be that normal sunbirds' nests are covered over with a thick adhesive fabric of grey spider's silk in such a way as to muffle and hide the nests completely -- including the twigs to which they were attached -- leaving only the entrance holes clear, probably the work of the sunbirds. On a superficial view the sac-like structures certainly looked as though the birds had actually been nesting in them. On closer examination, however, the porch of the sunbirds' nests sticking out as little projections under the spiders' fabric betrayed the truth that the complete nests were hidden within. It seems to me probable that G.W. Harvey's observations of cobweb nests of Isten's Sunbirds in Ceylon relate to a similar condition. Being smothered over and camouflaged in this manner would certainly accord survival value against normal enemies conditioned to recognise normal sunbird nests, and the highly sticky nature of the fabric would perhaps also deter Calotes lizards etc.

Some interesting questions arise from these observations which birdwatchers must try to answer:

1. Does the sunbird deliberately choose a branch in close proximity to the spiders' structures thereby virtually inviting the spiders to smother and conceal its nest under the dense grey tissue?
2. Or, does the spider of its own accord first discover a normal sunbird's nest, and use it as a convenient (and in some way advantageous) substrate for its nursery?
3. What advantage, if any, does the spider derive from this association? Does the sunbird feed on the self-same spider or its young?

The mechanics of this symbiosis -- as it clearly seems to be -- pose an interesting study in behaviour. It may be mentioned that such sunbirds' nests, enclosed within the spiders' fabric, have since been reported also from Masik and Devlali. It may thus be that they are not uncommon in the Deccan -- where babool trees are often seen draped with these grey masses -- now that one knows what to look for. The spider concerned in Poona has not been identified, but it is doubtless some species of the same Eresid genus Stegodyphus as in Ceylon.

Sálim Ali

A WEEKEND AT KEOLADEO

During the first week of April this year I spent a weekend at the Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary near Bharatpur. I was informed at the Bombay Natural History Society's office that Mr. Soman and Mr. Ambedkar of their staff would be there engaged in the WHO sponsored study on Bird Migration and I thought that a visit to the Sanctuary while they were there would make my trip both interesting and educational.

The motor ride from Delhi to Keoladeo, a distance of a little under 120 miles took $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours and I reached 'Shanti Kutir' the Rest House inside the Sanctuary at 10.30 a.m.

The Keoladeo Ghana comprises approximately 7000 acres, mainly scrub jungle and low-lying land, divided by bunds into numerous jheels. With the approach of summer when the jheels begin to dry up, water from the Ajan bund, a reservoir nearby, is let into the jheels.

The Sanctuary has a good network of roads so that even those allergic to walking, provided they have transport, can see a fair amount of bird and animal life without exerting themselves.

During and for some time after the rains when there is water everywhere, I am told that one could just sit on the verandah of the Rest House and yet see hundreds of water birds. But in April when I visited the Sanctuary the nearest jheel was a mile from the Rest House.

Work on the migration study had been in progress since the 20th March, and in three weeks over 4000 birds had been ringed. Most of these were Spanish Sparrows which roosted in some fields off the main road between Deeg and Bharatpur and about 12 miles from the Sanctuary.

I would have liked very much to see the Spanish Sparrows being netted. Soman and Ambedkar said there were enormous numbers of them that roosted at this place. They thought half a million was a conservative estimate.

As luck would have it the jeep that took them and their paraphernalia did not turn up on the weekend I was there and my taxi driver from Delhi was loth to have any poles tied to his car, so we had to be content with netting the wagtails which roosted in a bulrush bed in a jheel nearby.

The total number of birds netted on the two evenings was 170. Except for a Great Reed Warbler, a Redheaded Bunting, and a Baya Weaver Bird, the rest were all wagtails.

Sitting on the bank of the jheel while the netting proceeded in the bulrushes I gazed over an expanse of shallow water a half mile square. In it were more water birds than I had ever seen anywhere else. Ibises, spoonbills, openbilled storks, adjutants, painted storks, Sarus cranes, purple herons, grey herons, large and small egrets, darters, cormorants, coots, dabchicks, purple moorhens, spotbill ducks, nukta ducks, common sandpipers, ringed plovers, stints, and a solitary rosey pelican.

Beyond, on dry land was a gathering of thirty or forty whitebacked vultures. I could not see what they were feasting on. A few hundred yards to the right feeding on land by the water's edge were a pair of barheaded geese and a pair of Brahminy ducks, and beyond them browsing on tender green grass was a herd of blackbuck.

It was a primeval and peaceful scene. There was a continuous murmur among the birds, no clucking, muttering, flapping, flurrying they constantly sought vantage positions in their search for food.

The elegant and dignified looking Sarus Cranes were, strangely, the most vociferous. Every once in a while four or five of these birds that were feeding together would raise their heads and spread out their wings as

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The elegant and dignified looking Sarus Cranes were, strangely, the most vociferous. Every once in a while four or five of these birds that were feeding together would raise their heads and spread out their wings as if they were communicating by such chirruping.

During the first week of April this year I spent a weekend at the Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary near Bharatpur. I was informed at the Bombay Natural History Society's office that Mr. Soman and Mr. Ambedkar of their staff would be there engaged in the WHO sponsored study on Bird Migration and I thought that a visit to the Sanctuary while they were there would make my trip both interesting and educational.

The motor ride from Delhi to Keoladeo, a distance of a little under 120 miles took $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours and I reached 'Shanti Kutir' the Rest House inside the Sanctuary at 10.30 a.m.

The Keoladeo Ghana comprises approximately 7000 acres, mainly scrub jungle and low-lying land, divided by bunds into numerous jheels. With the approach of summer when the jheels begin to dry up, water from the Ajan bund, a reservoir nearby, is let into the jheels.

The Sanctuary has a good network of roads so that even those allergic to walking, provided they have transport, can see a fair amount of bird and animal life without exerting themselves.

During and for some time after the rains when there is water everywhere, I am told that one could just sit on the verandah of the Rest House and yet see hundreds of water birds. But in April when I visited the Sanctuary the nearest jheel was a mile from the Rest House.

Work on the migration study had been in progress since the 20th March, and in three weeks over 4000 birds had been ringed. Most of these were Spanish Sparrows which roosted in some fields off the main road between Deeg and Bharatpur and about 12 miles from the Sanctuary.

I would have liked very much to see the Spanish Sparrows being netted. Soman and Ambedkar said there were enormous numbers of them that roosted at this place. They thought half a million was a conservative estimate.

As luck would have it the jeep that took them and their paraphernalia did not turn up on the weekend I was there and my taxi driver from Delhi was loth to have any poles tied to his car, so we had to be content with netting the wagtails which roosted in a bulrush bed in a jheel nearby.

The total number of birds netted on the two evenings was 170. Except for a Great Reed Warbler, a Redheaded Bunting, and a Baya Weaver Bird, the rest were all wagtails.

Sitting on the bank of the jheel while the netting proceeded in the bulrushes I gazed over an expanse of shallow water a half mile square. In it were more water birds than I had ever seen anywhere else. Ibises, spoonbills, openbilled storks, adjutants, painted storks, Sarus cranes, purple herons, grey herons, large and small egrets, darters, cormorants, coots, dabchicks, purple moorhens, spotbill ducks, nukta ducks, common sandpipers, ringed plovers, stints, and a solitary rosy pelican.

Beyond, on dry land was a gathering of thirty or forty whitebacked vultures. I could not see what they were feasting on. A few hundred yards to the right feeding on land by the water's edge were a pair of burheaded geese and a pair of Brahminy ducks, and beyond them browsing on tender green grass was a herd of blackbuck.

It was a primeval and peaceful scene. There was a continuous murmur among the birds, as clucking, muttering, flapping, flurrying they constantly sought vantage positions in their search for food.

The elegant and dignified looking Sarus Cranes were, strangely, the most vociferous. Every once in a while four or five of these birds that were feeding together would raise their heads and spread out their wings as though expressing indignation, this being accompanied by much chirruping,

trumpeting, and mewing. But just when it appeared that feathers would start to fly the birds would most unaccountably subside into silence and resume their interrupted dinner.

During the six hours or so that I spent birdwatching over the weekend I spotted one hundred and eleven species. The figure would have been much less but for Somen's help as a number of the birds were my 'firsts' and would have taken me very much longer to identify on my own.

Referring to the list of land birds (observed in October) appended to the BHS booklet on the Keoladeo Ghana I list below some more that I saw there in April.

Brahminy Myna	Tawny Eagle
Pied Myna	Stone Curlew
Baya Weaver Bird	Red Munia
Maharatta Woodpecker	Blackbellied Finch Lark
Pied Kingfisher	Indian Skylark
Crested Bunting	Indian Pipit
Redheaded Bunting	Pied Bush-Chat
Painted Snipe	Paradise Flycatcher
Honey Buzzard	Common Iora
Yelloweyed Babbler	

Shankar Ranganathan

SOME UNCOMMON BIRD VISITORS OBSERVED IN AND AROUND TAMBURAM

Birds have been recorded at Tamburam (80° 7' E., 12° 55' N.) since 1938 (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 40:467-76; 744-7, and 56:637), and I wish to add here some more species that have so far not been recorded from this area. The 300-acre campus of the Madras Christian College is made up of scrub jungle, open fields, marshy areas, and flowering trees. Around the campus there are several tanks which dry up during the hot weather. The observations given here are confined to an area of three-mile radius, and those made from 1960.

The Honey Buzzard (Pernis ptilorhynchus) is met with singly in the scrub jungle from November to April. It is usually mobbed by the common crows and chased from tree to tree. The Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus) was once seen in the scrub jungle in December 1960. The Redwinged Crested Cuckoo (Clamator coromandus) was seen by Mrs. Siromoney and me on October 25, 1962. It stopped for a few minutes in the garden in the Argyrcia camp-enulata bushes. The Indian Plaintive Cuckoo (Cacomantis merulinus) is a regular visitor every year and is a winter resident between November and April.

The Greyheaded Mynas (Sturnus malabaricus) were seen in February 1962, and again in the same month this year in company of Blackheaded Mynas, eating the berries from the Zizyphus oenoplia bushes. In February 1962, there were more berries than the birds could manage and a single Rosy Pastor (Sturnus roseus) was seen on February 14, 1962 in the company of the mynas.

The female Redbreasted Flycatcher (Muscicapa parva) was noted every year between November and March. The male was seen for the first time on March 10, this year, and it turned out to be the European variety as it had no black borders on the breast. The bird usually confines itself to a small area and the call consists of 'chip, chip, chip' made in its flight.

The Southern Orangeheaded Ground Thrush (Zoothera citrina cyanotus) is much less common than the northern variety. In January 1962, a single bird came to our bird-bath regularly and was seen by my wife and me.

A group of Yellow Wagtails (Motacilla flava) were seen in a local tank bed between March 20 1961 and April 25, 1961 almost every day in groups varying from 3 to 20. The Forest Wagtail which we have already recorded

is known to stop at Tambaram during its southern and return movements every year.

The Rufousbreasted Mannikin (Lonchura keldarti) was seen once in the jungle on November 3 1961, and again after 3 days. It was making incessant noise and its mate could not be seen but was heard. The Spotted Munia (Lonchura punctulata) is seen occasionally in pairs.

The number of species of birds recorded in Tambaram is 96 but the list does not contain some of the common birds which I have observed. They are the Cattle, the Little, and the Large Egrets, the Common Bustard Quail, the Whitebreasted Waterhen, Wood Sandpiper, the Fantail Snipe, the Little Stint, the Indian Courser, the Whiskered-, Gullbilled, and Caspian Terns, the Swallow, Blyth's Reed Warbler, and the Dull Green Leaf Warbler.

Prof. Gift Siromoney,
Madras Christian College, Tambaram, S.I.

BUSTARD HABITAT IN RAJASTHAN DESERT

Since our reports on the Great Indian Bustard Choriotis nigricaps (Newsletter, October 1962; and April 1963), we have observed many more bustards and we are now convinced that this bird is quite common in the desert. Authentic reports of their egg-laying have also been received. Many groups of 8 to 10, and 12 to 15 birds were also observed. During the last few months we studied the vegetation at Pokran, Chandan, and Jaisalmer by the linear transect method, collected insects, reptiles and mammals, and observed the birds at these places with a view to have an idea of the biotic factors influencing the bustard population in this habitat.

The vegetation comprises of: large bushes of Zizyphus nummularia, Salvadora persica (only at Pokran), Calotropis procera, Capparis decidua (more at Pokran and near tanks), and Prosopis spiciagera (more frequent at Chandan and Jaisalmer); low shrub of Haloxylon salicornicum (14.6% at Chandan), Dactyloctenium indicum, Crotalaria burhia (5.4% at Chandan, and 14.3% at Jaisalmer); and the grasses Eleusine compressa (16.6% at Chandan, and 33.2% at Jaisalmer), Lasiurus sindicus (54.4 and 26.5% at either place), Cymbopogon jwaraneusa (12% at Pokran and Jaisalmer), and Panicum turgidum (4.9%). Other grasses like Cenchrus ciliaris, C. cathartica, etc. have a low percentage cover. The total plant cover varies from 10 to 14% at these places which is a considerably good cover in a desert. The bustards have been observed to take shelter under Salvadora, Capparis, Calotropis, and Zizyphus bushes. Two bustards were seen sitting in between big clumps of Cymbopogon also.

Locusts invade this region in summer, and are available as food to most of the birds in large numbers. The grasshoppers found in this habitat are: Pocilocerus pictus, Oedeleus marmoratus, Chrotogonus sp., Microglyphus nigrorepletus, Mantis sp., Croebater urbana, Microdula coarctata, Gryllus sagittatus; termites: Anacanthotermes macrocephalus; beetles: Anthia sexguttata, Juliodes alkinsoni, Blaps orientalis, Helicopriss bucephalus; dung roller: Onthophagus longicornis, Scarabeus sp., Aphodius sp., etc. These insects belong to the orders Orthoptera, Isoptera, and Coleoptera.

The following reptiles occur in this region: the earth snake, Lytorhynchus paradoxus, the rat snake, Ptyas mucosus, Coluber diadema, C. halana, the sand snake Eryx johnii and E. conicus; the krait Bungarus caeruleus, and B. sirdianum, the Cobra Naja naja, the viper Echis carinata, the Monitor Lizard Varanus monitor and V. priscus, other lizards like Uromastix hardwickii, Stenodactylus sp., Gymnodactylus sp., and Rubrocapra sp., Mabuya macularia, M. aurata,

Eumeces taeniolatus, and Ophisaurus tridactylus. Most of these lizards and small snakes are likely to be easy food of the bustards.

We are restricting the list of birds to raptors only, as only these will be the limiting factors for any increase in bustard population as they may prey upon their eggs or young. Among such birds, the following species are commonly observed in the bustard country: Common Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans), Shikra (Accipiter badius), Tawny Eagle (Aquila rapax), Short-toed Eagle (Circus gallicus), Redheaded Merlin (Falco chicquera), Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus), and White-eyed Buzzard (Buteo teesa).

Of the mammals, the Jackal (Canis aureus), Desert Fox (Vulpes vulpes pusilla), Bengal Fox (Vulpes bengalensis), Mongoose (Herpestes auropunctatus pallipes) and H. edwardsi ferrugineus, Indian Desert Cat (Felis libycus ornata), and the Jungle Cat (F. chaus prateri) are quite common in these arid tracts and these are likely to predate on the bustard.

A factor which will induce in the bustard a tendency to migrate locally is the availability of drinking water. Small pools and tanks are scattered in this desert region, and water is available throughout the year except during May and June.

Ishwar Prakash,
Palak V. Ghosh

Special Animal Studies Division, Central Arid
Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, Rajasthan

PARADISE LOST

My home village of Kavasseri in the Palghat Gap (Kerala) was an avian paradise some ten years ago. There were stretches of jungle and plenty of timber-land where teak and other trees used to grow into minor forests. The innumerable rolling hills were over-grown with various kinds of bushes and trees and one could spend hours watching birds in utter solitude. A few years ago these hillocks were cropped bare and rubber plantations came into existence. Now one does not see even one-tenth of the number of birds one used to some ten years ago. Most of the types one used to see are still here, but their numbers have decreased beyond credence. The very small number of unusual birds (the Red Sparrow, the Greenbilled Malkoha, the Whitethroated Groundthrush, to mention a few examples) are clinging on to the minute patches of scrub and woods that remain. Hundreds of poor families in the area used to gather all the firewood they required from the scrub and the woods. Now they are forced to concentrate on the same tiny patches of scrub where these birds have sought shelter, and, consequently, they will soon be driven out of these refuges too.

Could not nature lovers in our country try to persuade the authorities to adopt a policy which would ensure the retention of at least one-tenth of the area of scrub and wooded land in rural places when our economy demands the conversion of such land into rubber or other plantations?

Tea, coffee, and cardamom plantations are known to afford plenty of shelter to birds. In fact some of these are the most rewarding places from the birdwatchers' point of view. But rubber plantations attract few birds, and unfortunately, it is rubber and not tea that is replacing our scrub forest.

Prof. K.K. Nellikanten

Ernakulam

THE RETURN OF THE OSPREY. By Philip Brown and George Waterston. pp. 223. 20 monochrome photographs. London 1962. Collins. Price 21s.

Everybody loves a success story and everybody loves a story with a happy ending. This one abundantly fulfils both these desiderata. It is the account, pleasantly yet unpretentiously chronicled, of a magnificent achievement on the part of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; the record of a goal attained as the result of thorough planning, sheer hard work, devotion to the cause of bird protection, but above all an intense love of birds. Conservationists and nature lovers alike can be justly proud of a series of triumphs, for the book deals not only with the return of the Osprey, but also with that of the Avocet and the Blacktailed Godwit as breeding species to Britain after a lapse of 50 to a 100 years.

There is a short, but apposite, Foreword by R.S.R. Fitter, followed by two chapters on the Osprey -- one on its return by Philip Brown and the other concerning its natural history by George Waterston. These form the main portion of the book. The next two chapters deal with the Avocet -- first by Gwen Davies with the bird's return, and the second by Philip Brown with its behaviour. Peter Conder deals with the return of the Blacktailed Godwit in the next, and in the final chapter R.S.R. Fitter writes of other former breeding birds.

The return of the Osprey to its traditional breeding haunts in Scotland, after an absence of 50 years or so, can be attributed, we learn, to a westerly spread of the bird's breeding range in Scandinavia.

The extermination of the Osprey in Britain is due entirely to the nefarious practices of game-keepers, gunners, and egg-collectors, for man is the bird's only enemy. The more effectively the first two slaughtered the birds, the more attractive and lucrative egg-collecting became. This part of the story makes melancholy reading indeed, and one feels both sick at heart and filled with rage at people who could be so cruel, callous, and thoroughly anti-social as to systematically rob complete clutches of eggs and even nestlings and then, for good measure, shoot the adult birds, sometimes on the nest, to the point of exterminating the species in an entire country. One is sorely tempted to agree with Colonel Meinertzhagen when in PIRATES AND PREDATORS he declares man to be 'the prime predator and the vilest vermin'.

One's spirits rise sharply when one reads that after being unsuccessful for four years in succession (in 1958 due to a collector cluding the watchers one dark night, climbing the nesting tree, and taking the eggs) the birds have brought off young successfully since 1959; a total of nine young having reached the free-flying stage up to and including the 1962 breeding season.

The Society very wisely decided that each year, as soon as it was safe to do so, the public, carefully controlled, should be allowed to watch the Ospreys from a hide specially erected for the purpose. What a testimony it is to the change in public attitude to wildlife, and to the way in which the whole project has caught the imagination, that nearly 70,000 people had, by the end of last season, been to see the splendid birds, if only for a few brief moments.

The story of the Avocets is by now well known -- of how, had it not been for a stray shell from a near-by firing range damaging one of the sluice gates, the water level in the lagoons on Havengate Island, in the river Alde in Suffolk, may never have been suitable for the Avocets to nest -- of the damage that was caused by the floods in 1953, and how by working day and night the R.S.P.B. Staff and voluntary helpers repaired the damage, only just in time for the returning avocets to enjoy a successful breeding season. Despite the depredations

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bought, primarily, as a sanctuary for them.

The return of the Blacktailed Godwit as a breeding species to Britain, after just over 100 years, was first discovered in 1952. Its breeding localities have been kept a closely-guarded secret, and despite egg-stealing by crows and the danger to nests of grazing cattle, numbers have increased to the present figure of about 12 breeding pairs. The future of the Blacktailed Godwit as a breeding species in Britain depends upon the birds spreading to other suitable areas of wet grass-land, and upon the preservation of this very scarce habitat.

The preponderance of space devoted to the Osprey gives the book as a whole a slight lack of balance, but surprisingly enough the plurality of authorship does not result in the unevenness of style one might have expected. The lack of an index detracts from the otherwise high standard of the book. The general format of the volume is excellent, as are the illustrations, with two or three minor exceptions, in which the quality of the photographs fall below the level of the remainder. On page 148 the reader is referred to a photograph which has been omitted.

One whole-heartedly wishes this book the success it should have, as the royalties from it are being devoted to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Sandy, Bedfordshire, from whom, incidentally, the book may be obtained, with financial benefit to the Society.

S.K.R.

Footnote:

Your reviewer nostalgically recalls seeing three Ospreys in January 1958 at a large talao called 'Kanewal', in what used to be the Nawab of Cambay's territory, but is now part of the Kaira District, Gujarat State. One of the birds dived into the water with a great splash, but was apparently unsuccessful in securing a fish. I see that Salim Ali saw the bird at near-by Golana in late 1945 or early 1946 (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 52:402). I saw another in the same year on the Vatrak river at Matar in the same district. Once again I experienced the thrill of seeing the bird dive from a considerable height, but on this occasion also the great bird failed to secure its quarry.

S.K.R.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Wanted Urgently

If any reader knows of a good artist, preferably a birdwatcher, who sketches or paints birds and would be capable of producing life-like scientifically accurate illustrations of Indian birds, would he please get him to contact Dr. Salim Ali at 33 Pali Hill, Bombay 50 (Telephone No. 88425).

Our Library

In continuation of the notice in the Newsletter for July 1963 about our library, we are glad to announce that the following books have been sent to us by Mr. Samir Sen:

BIRDS. By A. Landsborough Thomson. London 1927.

SONGS OF WILD BIRDS. By D.M. Nicholson & Ludwig Koch. London 1948.

THE BIRDS OF CALCUTTA. By F. Fynn. Calcutta 1901.

WATCHING BIRDS. By James Fisher. London 1946.

BIRD RECOGNITION. I. Sea-birds and Waders. By James Fisher. London 1947.

HOW TO KNOW BRITISH BIRDS. By Norman H. Joy. London 1948.

HOW TO KNOW THE INDIAN WADERS. By F. Fynn. 2nd edition, Calcutta 1920.

BRITISH NESTING BIRDS. By W. Percival Westell. London.

THE BRITISH BIRD. By E.A.R. Munnich. London 1945.

AUSTRALIAN BIRD LIFE. By Charles Barrett. Melbourne 1947.

THE CALL OF THE BIRDS. By Charles S. Bayne. Revised ed. London 1945.
 BIRD LIFE OF THE SEASONS. By W. Percival Westell. London 1944.
 THE BIRDS OF MASSACHUSETT. By Ludlow Griscom, and Edith V. Folger.
 Harvard University, Cambridge, 1948.
 BRITISH BIRDS. By Wilfred Lillett. London 1948.
 THE BIRDS OF KUTCH. By Salim Ali. Bombay 1945.
 BRITISH BIRDS IN COLOUR. Edited by R.S.R. Fitter & others. London.
 WINGS IN THE WILDERNESS. By Allan D. Cruickshank. New York 1947.
 THE RUFFED GROUSE. By Henry Marion Hall. New York 1946.
 GAME BIRDS OF INDIA, BURMA & CEYLON, Vol. III - Pheasants and Bustard Quails. By Stuart Baker. London 1930.
 CUCKOO PROBLEMS. By E.C. Stuart Baker. London 1942.
 BIRDS IN BRITAIN. By Frances Pitt. London 1948.
 FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds. By E.C. Stuart Baker (a complete set of 8 volumes)

CORRESPONDENCE

Racial Identification of Birds

With reference to Mr. Joseph George's note about the Wryneck in Newsletter for July (p. 7), may I register a humble protest against the tendency of birdwatchers to assign, or attempt to assign, subspecific precision to their field observations? Sight records of subspecies based on one or two observations, and no specimens collected, especially in the case of controversial races (of which there are far too many), are of little scientific value, and lead nowhere. They serve only to confuse and exercise the amateur to whom subspecies are, in any case, of minor significance.

Let us leave the quibbling over subspecies, their tenability and validity, and their identification, to the specialists equipped with 'the eye of faith' who sit in museums surrounded by trays of dry skins and enjoy their little fun and games with the dead. Let us, on the other hand, make the best of our unmatched opportunities with the living.

Salim Ali

How to pronounce 'Jacana'

Birdwatchers who have stumbled over how to pronounce 'Jacana' will be interested in the correct pronunciation and derivation of the name given in the recent publication BIRDS OF THE WORLD by Oliver L. Austin Jr, of Florida State Museum. Mr. Austin says it should be pronounced 'YA-sa-na' with the accents on the first and last syllables. The name came into English from the Spanish, who adopted it from the Tupi Indians of the Amazon basin.

Peter F.R. Jackson,
Reuters, New Delhi.

Bluecheeked Bee-eater

I was interested in your article on the Bluecheeked Bee-eater in the July issue of the Newsletter. I had seen four of these birds on 2 December 1960 near the Wadala salt pans. They were perched on telegraph wires. They allowed close approach and did not resent observation. One of them picked up a wasp from the ground about 3 yards from where I was sitting.

V. Udaya Shankar Rao
Tata Inst. of Fundamental Res.

About our Newsletter

You will be amazed to hear how lately I received a letter from one Major Seaton whom I must have known in Rangoon perhaps over 30 years ago! It seems some one sent him a few copies of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers to his London address, and he came across an article or note by Capt. N.S. Tyabji and immediately got in touch with him. Thus was established - or re-established - a contact after almost 30 years. Through Capt. Tyabji he got my address, and thus the letter from him. So the entire credit for re-establishment of this contact goes to the Newsletter. Please accept my grateful thanks.

A.S. Tyabji, Jamshedpur

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Editor :

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 September



NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 3, No. 9

September 1963

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RECOVERY OF RINGED BIRDS

Since the last announcement (Newsletter Vol. 3, No. 6, June 1963) of recoveries of birds ringed under the IHBH/WHO Bird Migration Field Study Project, information regarding two more recoveries of our ringed birds has come in. The particulars are as follows:

Date Ringed	Ring No. & species	Place ringed	Date re-covered	Place re-covered	Remarks
16.12.62	A-22268 <u>Motacilla flava thunbergi</u> (Grey-headed Yellow Wagtail)	Edanad, Chennamangalam, Kerala, c. 9° 20' N. x 76° 38' E.	Found dead 16.5.1963	Southern part of Karaganda region, Kazakhstan, USSR, c. 46° N. x 72° E.	c. 4170 km. north of Edanad
12.11.62	AB-1690 <u>Tringa stagnatilis</u> (Marsh Sandpiper)*	Point Calimere, Tanjore District, Madras State, c. 10° N. x 80° E.	Shot by man 4.5.63	Novosibirsk region, near Kupino, USSR, c. 54° 22' N. x 77° 18' E.	c. 4930 km. north of Madras

*Tringa stagnatilis the Marsh Sandpiper, aptly also called Little Greenshank, breeds in the Palearctic Region (except western Europe) across middle Asia east to Mongolia. It is a smaller and slimmer replica of the Greenshanks, with a very slender bill, white back and rump and more or less white upper tail-coverts, and altogether one of the daintiest and most beautiful of the tribe. In its winter quarters in India it keeps mainly to the sea coast; hardly ever seen inland.

Salim Ali

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BIRD NOTES FROM RAJKOT, GUJARAT

Normally July is a very wet month and most of our annual rainfall is received during this and the next month. The heavy showers are caused by strong convectional updrafts at the beginning of July, and there is usually much thunder and lightening to liven the performance.

This stormy beginning is then followed by a steady wind with low drifting clouds, which in the earlier parts of the morning almost percolate through the tree-tops and in hilly places everything is cool, damp, and misty. After the glare and heat and dust of summer this is very pleasant indeed. In August the clouds break up and then there are a few days of sun and clouds often with light showers and a brisk breeze. During this period, the crops and grass start growing rapidly and the countryside looks most charming. Birds are now busy feeding hungry and vociferous families. For the bird photographer starts a very busy period. The hot sun of September, soon asserts itself over the clouds, and there follows a period of high cumulous clouds, a gentle breeze, and everywhere there is a luminosity that enhances the colours of the sky, grass, and trees. As if to join in with the pageantry of colour, the little flowers start showing, and in grasslands, we see carpets of yellow composites, small, but making a brave show by their massed growth. The grass now tall and in seed, rustle and quiver as the wind plays among them. It is a fine period to be out. Most of the birds are being followed by fledglings on the wing, but there is again a certain amount of song in the air. Strangely enough, the Jungle Wren Warbler is on its eggs or has a nest-load of chicks; it has to wait for the grass to grow tall enough to hold its domed nest. This period is further enlivened by the arrival of a large number of migrants, many on passage to Arabia and Africa. Among these are the showy Kashmir Rollers and Bluecheeked Bee-eaters. White-throats, Spotted Flycatchers, and Redbacked Shrikes are plentiful, though soon to leave after a very short sojourn with us. There are a few violent storms with localised rain and strong winds and much lightening and thunder, and then one morning the wind veers to the north-west and the skies are clear and blue and the monsoon is gone. The grass now turns to a golden yellow or russet and with patches of green of late varieties. The mimosas and acacias are in bloom and the air is heavy with their scent and filled with the drone of bees and other insects. The cool season has set in and the air develops an edge to it in the mornings; winter migrants start dropping in and so one more monsoon and a bird-breeding season has gone.

This year, however, there has been very little rain, and we are faced with severe water shortage and of course a great need for fodder. The entire month has been inordinately cool and there has been much cloud, but none of the great storms have materialised, to pour down rains to slake the parched soil and to fill lakes and wells with life giving water. It is a very bad season for every one including the birds and the birdwatchers. The question is what will happen to the drinking water supply as all the reservoirs are low, having received no fresh water. We shall have a very poor winter with waders unless we visit the sea coasts.

Strange as it may seem, I have made an addition to my list directly due to the drought, and that too of a bird of marshes. An old boy of my school saw a strange bird skulking in his agave hedge some 15 miles from here. Fortunately for the bird, his curiosity did not make him take up a gun, but instead as the bird seemed loath to fly, they beat around until it was disturbed and flew into trees of their near-by orchard. Here, strange to tell, the bird flew from one tree to another until exhausted, and hid under cover and allowed itself to be caught. As it would not eat grain offered to it, though resembling a game bird, but nothing like anything seen by the nimrods of the village, the boy had the sense to bring it over to me. At first glance I was completely nonplussed as to its identity. It was obviously one of the rails. The key in the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds, proved very handy in placing the bird as a female Kora or Water Cock. Being great skul-

kers, they are not seen frequently, and the female looks like a crane and is probably overlooked as one of those mysterious creatures that tread reedy labyrinths, their identity best left to a future date.

Readers will be happy to know that the bird has been released in the place it was caught. The question arises as to what a waterside bird was doing in a field hedge? No doubt, the drying up of its reed-fringed pools in the near-by stream had forced it to take up temporary abode in the shelter offered by the hedgegrove, and on being disturbed, it was at a loss to know where to go, being surrounded by vast expanses of open fields, and so it took refuge in the orchard where it was captured.

This is an interesting record for Saurashtra. I will now never fail to give every rail or moorhen a second and more careful glance, and every rustle in a reed-bed will be investigated for the possible presence of a male Kora with his heraldic shield over the head.

K.S. Iavkumar

[Apropos of this note by K.S. Iavkumar we are giving two extracts about the Kora or Watercock which may interest readers.

Frank Finn (1906) in HOW TO KNOW THE INDIAN WADERS (pp. 96-7) writes: "This is a peculiarly leggy, long-toed bird, with a shield on the forehead pointed at the back, and growing out there into a long horn in the breeding male, which also differs much from the female in plumage, and is much larger.

"Out of the breeding season both sexes are pale brown, heavily streaked with dark brown above and finely barred with that colour below. In the breeding season the male becomes slaty-black nearly all over.

"In the male the bill, shield, and legs are red; in the female the bill is yellowish and the legs are dark green; the eyes, which are red in the male, being brown. Young birds are like the hen, but less barred below.

"The cock is nearly a foot and a half long, with the wing over eight inches, and the shank three, the middle toe being even longer than this. The hen is only fourteen inches in length, with the wing seven inches, and the shank about two and a half."

A letter to the Editor of the defunct Stray Feathers from J.R. Cripps dated July 10th 1874 reads: "Sir, Are you aware that the natives of the Dacca and Tipperah districts very often themselves hatch the eggs of the Watercock (Gallicrex cinereus)? The modus operandi is to take half a coconut shell, put a layer of cotton in, on top of which place the egg and fill up with cotton; the shell is then placed on the man's navel, and tied on with a long strip of cloth, which is wound round the body. Until the egg is hatched the man never bathes. At first I discredited the story, but many respectable natives assure me that they have known instances of this being done; they value those birds hatched by man very much. Jerdon says, on the authority of Dr. Taylor, that the 'Korah' is kept for fighting purposes; they are kept for the purpose of catching wild ones. When a wild one is heard calling, the tame bird being let loose finds him out, and grappling keeps hold until the owner comes up and catches both. I know two zamindars in the Tipperah district who are enthusiasts at this. Now [July] is the time for this sport."

It would be interesting to learn from "respectable natives", if such there be (!), whether this hatching technique and sport are still in vogue, and details in this connection would be welcome. -- Editor

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GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD BREEDING IN RAJASTHAN DESERT

During July 1963, twentytwo Great Indian Bustards were observed in the Pokran-Chandan region. Nine birds were seen at a time in an overgrazed grassland of Cymbopogon sp. On the 26th of July, an egg was observed in a deep oval scrape which was 15 cm. long and about 10 cm. broad

on the wider side. The scrape was much smaller than the one observed by Shri Dharmakumarsinhji (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 59:173-184) who records 'a typical bustard-scrape, oval in shape and about a foot in length, pointing north-south, in short and long thin grass with Zizyphus bushes and a dry leafless plant close by'. This scrape was situated in loose sand and there was no lining except a few pebbles. It was situated in the centre of three Cymbopogon stalks which were 10-15 cm. wide and hardly 3 cm. tall. The egg was visible from a distance. Although Aerva tomentosa, Zizyphus nummularia, and Capparis aphylla bushes were there, yet the bird preferred to lay the egg in an open plain. The egg was 100 mm. long and 50 mm. in diameter at the wider side. Its weight was not taken as it was thought that handling might scare the bird. The egg was light olive-green in colour with paler tint on the broader end. It had linear dark brownish streaks.

At 2 p.m. the bird was nowhere near the egg. It was observed hatching it between 8 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. and in the evening. During the night the egg was lying unattended.

It is surprising how the bustard eggs survive unprotected in such open land where hundred of chinkara and thousands of sheep and cattle graze. There are lots of predators also like the desert cat, desert fox, jackal, mongoose, and a good many raptorial birds.

Two more eggs have been reported by our field-staff in this area. Hatching of the eggs and growth of the young chicks will be observed.

Ishwar Prakash & Pulak K. Ghosh

Special Animal Studies Div., Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

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WHERE TO GO TO WATCH BIRDS

Many an enthusiastic birdwatcher firmly believes that one should do a lot of trekking in the countryside in order to come across 'rare' birds. I have found that if luck favours, 'rare' birds will come knocking at our doors! During the first fortnight of April 1963, at Ernakulam, in the heart of the town I was able to watch two birds — till then practically unknown to me — from my house, and watch them to my heart's content.

The first bird was a Drongo Cuckoo (Surnieulus lugubris). My wife drew my attention to a small dark bird which was clinging to the spear-like, sprouting leaf of an arecanut tree. Having brought my binoculars out to confirm my identification of it as a Pigmy Woodpecker, I decided to scan the branches of a mango tree close by. What appeared to be a King Crow was sitting on a mistletoe-covered branch. I wouldn't have taken a second look at it if it had not jumped off to take a caterpillar from one of the leaves. Its flight was not at all drongo-like, but even then I did not take real notice of it. When it fluttered back to a perch, I looked at it through the glasses and was surprised to see it sitting with its tail laid horizontally on a few leaves. No Drongo would ever sit crouched like that, I felt. Then I noticed that the bird had 3 small white feathers on the hind crown! The shape of the head and the bill seemed to be 'different' too. By that time the bird had begun to pluck off and swallow, one by one, some large caterpillars that clung in a row to a mistletoe leaf. As the bird's tail moved about I was able to see also that its vent as well as most of the tail feathers had thin, white crescents on them. There could be no more doubts about its identity! I was able to watch it for the most part of half an hour. My only regret was that the bird never uttered its call. Having eaten a number of the thick juicy caterpillars, leaving quite a few still feeding on the leaf, it hopped off and began preening.

Thought that was the only time I saw the Drongo Cuckoo here, it was the

discovery of this 'rarity' that led to my spotting a Blacknaped Oriole on the same tree on the 10th of April. Having got into the habit of looking for the return of the Drongo Cuckoo, I was studying the birds on the mango tree and found what seemed to be an Indian Oriole. The bird, however, was not yellow enough to be a male Indian Oriole while its eye-stripe was too black and too striking for a female Indian Oriole. The binoculars settled the question. It was Oriolus chinensis! This bird, however, paid repeated-visits to our area, gave me my fill of its voice, and obliged me by showing me the back of its head to make confirmation doubly sure. I saw the same bird almost every day till the 17th of April.

It is interesting to note that both these birds had been attracted to the place by the occurrence of a particularly suitable kind of food: the Drongo Cuckoo had undoubtedly come in search of the large caterpillars; the Oriole had come for the ripe fruit of a large mulberry bush growing 15 yards away from the mango tree.

These berries were being greedily eaten by Green Barbets, Redvented Bulbuls, and Magpie Robins. But neither the Blackheaded nor the Indian Oriole ever came near the mulberry plant, though they used to visit the mango tree fairly regularly. Why?

It is probable that mulberry fruit is well known to the Blacknaped Oriole while it is comparatively unknown, owing to its rarity in this region, to the other two species of oriole. But if Green Barbets, Bulbuls, and Magpie Robins (strict residents of the locality) could discover that mulberry fruit is delicious, what prevented the orioles from following suit?

If any budding birdwatcher asks me again where he should go to look for birds, I will tell him, with religious conviction now, "Go home and look at the nearest trees or ponds, or up into the sky that is right over your roof".

K.K. Neelakantan

XXI/12799, Karikamuri Road, Ernakulam,
Kerala

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NON-HEREDITARY WHITE PLUMAGE

So far it has been assumed that abnormal white plumage in wild birds is hereditary, but studies at the World Bird Research Station in England have shown that a good deal, but not all, of such abnormal white plumage results from the intake of excessive artificial food and is non-hereditary. They feel that with the increasing number of people feeding wild birds such plumage might be on the increase, since it is frequently associated with the haunts of man, though it varies widely between different countries of the world, and within countries is much more frequent in some areas than in others.

The World Bird Research would be thankful if readers send them the following information about abnormally white marked birds:

Species

How much of the plumage affected and where.

Type locality, e.g. garden, park, scrub, forest.

Whether in a town, town edge, suburbs, rural area or area completely beyond the habitation of man.

If the bird(s) has been seen for more than a year, please state if the plumage has stayed the same or altered.

F u r t h e r S t u d y

For those interested in further study, counts of the proportion of birds

with abnormal white plumage can be made in two ways:

- (a) On finding a bird with abnormal plumage, count a hundred other birds in the same area without regard to species and including birds of the same species as the abnormal one. Among these 101 birds there may or may not be other birds with abnormal plumage. While reporting describe the abnormal bird as given above, and the numbers of the different species examined in the hundred together with sex where distinguishable. The count can be made over a period of several days.
- (b) The second way is to visit a place at random and report on a total of hundred birds, giving the names and numbers of species, and descriptions of abnormal birds, if any. The most useful areas are either towns or deep in the countryside. If a rural area is studied give the distance to the nearest town. More than one set of observations can be made if time permits.

It must be remembered that negative results are as important as positive ones, and all reports should be sent to Mr. Noble Rollin, World Bird Research Station, Glanton, Northumberland, England.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara

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THE LARGE CORMORANT : UNITED FRONT

A crisp, cool morning breeze, low-lying clouds covering the hills and the various birds chirping and singing away while searching for insects; I had set out on such a morning accompanied by my dogs round the Nakhi Lake. About half-way round, my attention was drawn by five Large Cormorants which had started their daily work. They were all proceeding abreast in a straight line and the amazing part of the whole performance was they were all diving simultaneously. Blob-blob they would disappear and come out one by one. The one emerging first would give a sort of look around for the others. When all five had surfaced, they would again get into formation and repeat the submerging again. This united front was carried on right till they came to the opposite shore of the lake which roughly took them fifteen minutes to reach. This unique sort of team-work among birds is observed by me for the first time.

Nirmalkumar of Jasdan,
Sanand House, Nakhi Lake, Mt. Abu

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CAT-AND-MOUSE ANTICS OF A CORMORANT

A note in my diary made at Keoladeo Ghana, Bharatpur, 3 years ago reminds me of this interesting incident. A Large Cormorant (Phalacrocorax carbo), obviously sated, dived and brought up a catfish about 6 inches long in its bill. It swam with the quarry to the shore some 30 feet away and dropped it struggling on the bank, obviously enjoying the spectacle. Presently it picked up the fish again and swam out with it some distance, released it in the water, dived after it, caught it again and carried it back to the shore. The bird repeated these manoeuvres deliberately several times before jerking the fish into position and swallowing it head foremost, which it seemed in no hurry to do. This is manifestly the same play as a cat makes with a mouse it has caught, and clearly for the fun of it.

Sálim Ali

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ON THE NESTING HABITS OF THE INDIAN ROBIN,
SAXICOLOIDES FULICATA (LINNAEUS)

In 1958 I saw a pair of Indian Robin, Saxicoloides fulicata (Linnaeus) building a nest on a fuse-box in our lecture theatre. The nest was completed towards the end of February and by the end of the breeding season three successive broods of robins were raised in the same nest.

At the same spot in 1959 a pair built a nest in which once again three successive broods were raised.

Again in February 1960, a pair of robins came to nest at the same tradition-al spot. The female laid the first clutch of two eggs in the first week of March but with one reason or the other the birds were disturbed quite often, so the eggs failed to hatch and the female laid in the same nest a second clutch which was also of two eggs. Out of these eggs one was destroyed but the other hatched out on 10 April. This time I ringed both the birds and their chick. The chick left the nest on the 22nd, but did not leave the lecture theatre till the 26th; between the 22nd and 26th I often saw the male bringing food to the chick which had by now turned into fledgling. After that I did not see this young bird for two days. When I saw it again on the 29th, I saw it far away from its parents' territory and curiously enough in association with another pair of robins, which was also ringed by me earlier. The fledgling was following the female (of this pair) feeding on the ground and I watched its movement for about half an hour. While still following the female it begged for food time to time and though though at times the female responded by feeding it, the former often tried to chase it away. However, the chick persisted in following this female, and once when it was mobbed by sparrows, it was this female that rescued it. During all this time the mate of this female was busy carrying away nesting material and the fledgling paid no attention to it. After the 29th I saw the fledgling quite often and on 18 May when I saw it for the last time it was still following the same female begging for food.

While the fledgling was wandering with other robins, its parents were busy making their old nest (on the fuse-box) tidy. Once the nest was arranged the female laid the third clutch of three eggs, out of which the egg that was laid second did not hatch but the other two hatched out by 15 May. Both the chicks steadily grew up and left the nest together on the 26 May. Thereafter, I did not see the chicks but saw their parents several times during the month of June; the male even visited the lecture theatre from time to time. After June 1960 I have not seen the female up to this date, (21.8.63), but the male came to the same place to breed again in 1961.

In 1961 when the male came back in the company of a female that had no ring, the lecture theatre was converted into a laboratory, and a number of changes had been made in the hall. That year, the traditional place of nesting on the fuse-box was abandoned in favour of a cardboard box lying on a window sill. In this box the robins managed to raise their first brood, but after the departure of the chicks the female was killed accidentally and the male left the hall never to return there again. Since then the robins have stopped nesting in that hall.

R.M. Naik, Ph.D.
 M.S. University, Faculty
 of Science, Baroda

REVIEW

PAVO : The Indian Journal of Ornithology, Vol. I, No. 1. Published by the Dept. of Zoology, M.S. University, Baroda

This is the first issue of a half-yearly journal which will be published by the Society of Animal Morphologists & Physiologists. As the editor, Prof. J.C. George says, it is 'the outcome of a long cherished desire to have a distinctive Indian journal of ornithology to publish original research papers on the life of Indian birds in particular, and of the birds

of the world at large.'

The first article in the new journal, is an account by J.P. Thaker of the place of the peacock in India's history and literature. Among the other contributions Dhruv Dixit has written a carefully analytical account of the nesting of a Redvented Bulbul which chose to nest on the cup of a light elevator in his bedroom, an excellent site from the observer's point of view. The article is illustrated by photographs as well as sketches by the author. B.S. Lamba has written about the nesting of the Pond Heron. A particularly interesting note about the discovery of the Honey-guide in Nepal has been contributed by R.L. Fleming.

The bird is like a female rose-finch. When the bees which build hives on abrupt cliffs and rock walls desert their hives, the Honey-guide comes in flocks of thousands to feed on the surplus wax until the cliff is once more smooth. Dr. Fleming's discovery of the bird was, apparently the first record in that area and he was justly elated with his success.

Pavo will have the good wishes of everyone who is interested in the bird life of our country. And we hope that it will soon establish a place for itself among the ornithological journals of the world.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

In the June-July issue of Natural History there is an interesting article by Karoly Koffan on the ways of a parasitic bird. There are excellent photographs of a young European Cuckoo being fed by female birds of other species that were in the neighbourhood. Apparently the hungry cry of a young bird stimulates not only its own parents real or foster but females of other species also lend a hand. The author transferred a newly hatched cuckoo from a distant Wood Lark's nest on to the nest of a Spotted Flycatcher. The new comer ejected the rightful owner but the foster parents dutifully fed it. The persistent cries of this young cuckoo attracted flycatchers, warblers, song thrushes, and tree sparrows, and it was fed on earthworms, grubs, caterpillars, etc.

Some of our readers may have seen a note by Malcolm Macdonald about a group of Jungle Babblers which looked after the young of their own kind, published in 1959 in the J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 56(1):132-3, but apparently social instincts in birds go far beyond their own species. It will be interesting to learn if any of our readers have come across situations of this kind.

CORRESPONDENCE

Baroda Birdwatchers' Club

In 1960 Shri Dharmakumarsinhji inaugurated the Birdwatchers' Club. Smt. Saralaben J. Mehta was elected President, and Prof. J.C. George and Dr. R. M. Naik as Vice-Presidents.

With the cooperation and help received from the Zoology Department of the M.S. University, the Club was able to usher in scientific birdwatching in Baroda. This year's activities of the Club started with a film show on 3 August, attended by about 300 enthusiasts. We owe an apology to the many others who could not be accommodated in the theatre. On 4 August the Club conducted an excursion to the 'Kamati Baug' to put in track the neophytes. The grand old man of Baroda gardens, Shri Zal P. Popat, the talented naturalist, Shri D.D. Gaikwad, and Prof. George's students explained the birds to the neophytes.

It will be a pleasure for the Club to welcome and help birdwatchers who

happen to drop in at Baroda. They may contact the Honorary Secretary of the Club.

A.R.K. Das
Honorary Secretary
Baroda Birdwatchers' Club
c/o Division of Avian Biology
M.S. University of Baroda

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An unforgettable moment in birdwatching

Thinking over some of the exhilarating experiences I have had in my few years of birdwatching, I feel I must record the following incident as my most unforgettable moment in birdwatching.

The place was Edanad and the day a very rainy one in late March. All day the inmates of the 1962 spring migration camp were hoping against hope that the rain would stop in time to allow the evening's netting. Then at 5 p.m. it happened. The rain suddenly stopped and out stepped a majestic rainbow arching triumphantly over the dark and white clouds. Soon the wagtails started arriving too, flocks after flocks of them winging their way east to the nightly roost. The 'inverted cup' of the Edanad sky was soon full of myriads of milling Yellow Wagtails, in various stages of the drop-to-roost. Caught against a back-drop of the rainbow and clouds their underparts shone like a million specks of gold. The orange rays of the setting sun added to their lustre. For a fleeting moment it looked as though the starry firmament had come nearer. Soon it was all over as the wagtails hit hay but the scene remains fresh in my mind.

Daniel Mathew
Santa Cruz

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Which is our National Bird?

The official circular of the Government of India on the subject of our National Bird states that the Peacock Pavo cristatus has been chosen as our National Bird.

Which is our National Bird? The Peafowl Pavo cristatus or the Peacock which is the male of the species Pavo cristatus?

Joseph George
Central Building Research
Institute, Roorkee

Will Government please explain? -- Ed.

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Strange behaviour of the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher!

A pair of Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura albogularis) built a nest in a lemon tree near my house. The nest was complete by the end of April 1963. On 2 May three eggs were laid. I found that the nest was not left unattended during that whole day. A crow was driven away at about 17.30. The incubation continued. Both sexes shared the duty for several days continuously. On 8 May I found one egg turned one-third muddy coloured. I became suspicious about the other two eggs. I continued my observations. On 11 May at 13.45 I found something unusual happening. There was unrest among the birds. One of them was pecking in the inside and at the bottom of the nest. The other bird was very near. The nest was under my eyes at a distance of a metre. I could not understand the behaviour of the bird. I took it for granted that the bird was trying to make its accommodation in the nest safe. In the meanwhile it took to its wings suddenly. I looked into

the nest. There were only two eggs. A question arose. What about the third one? I thought that it might have been broken and the birds might be trying to throw away the debris. I watched steadfastly. After some time I found that the bird in the nest was actually pecking at the bottom of the nest. It then caught something red (about 0.4 cm. long) in its beak and flew away. It again returned to the nest. This time the pecking at the bottom was hard. It shook the nest and the eggs too. One of the eggs turned upside down. I found a small crack in it. The bird pecked at that very crack. I could not understand the situation. The bird caught the egg in its beak and flew away. I came running back to the nest. The third egg was intact and the bird was incubating it.

On 16 May in the early morning I found the last egg lost. And that finished my observations.

C.S. Suthar
Sharda Mandir, Vallabh Vidyanagar
Western Railway.

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On the House Sparrow

When I read your note I decided that I might as well study the sparrows (a number of them had moved in during our month's absence) as the birds had come to share our home with us. As a first step I put a shallow palmyrah leaf basket in one of the caves in the hall. Sure enough a sparrow couple came and decided to take it on as their homestead. I sat down to watch them. It took them fifteen minutes (I clocked the time) to make sure it was safe. It is quite interesting to watch. Mr. Sparrow jumps on the edge of the basket and hopping sideways makes a tour of the rim of the basket. All this while the dutiful wife is inside waiting patiently. Then the male sits inside, and the female starts reconnaissance. When they are satisfied, both step into the basket and we hear a lot of pecking. A complete three minutes of argument takes place. Only after that they start their hunt for building materials. Our house being a bit isolated, they have not much trouble collecting grass and straw. Within a very short while, I could see the basket filled full to the brim with straw. I had left an interspace of a couple of inches from the roof for the sparrows to go into their nests. Even that space seems to be filled with grass. When the main nest frame is completed, the weaving begins. It is quite a pretty sight how they perch on the branch of an acacia, slowly nip a little bunch of leaves and fly to their nest. Then, of course, they draw on me by helping themselves to the little bits of cotton or thread that I leave about by oversight. The jute threads I find are first given a complete softening treatment on the ground itself. They stand on one end of the thread and start pecking till it becomes fluffy. Then it is carried off.

I kept another basket in the other hall. To my surprise I find sparrows do not trouble us now. But for the couples in the two rooms there are not many. What has happened to all the crowd?

(Mrs.) Rajeshwari Padmanabhan,
Mettur Dam, South India

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NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 October



NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 3, No. 10

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'MIGRATORY' MOVEMENTS OF THE OPENBILL STORK (ANASTOMUS OSCITANS)

In March 1963 I circulated an appeal to the zonal Directors of Lighthouses in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, requesting them to collect through their various lighthouse keepers information concerning any seasonal bird movements observed. In response to this the Head Keeper of Sacramento Light-house near Kakinada on the east coast (E. Godavari Dist., Andhra), furnish-ed the following:

At 3 a.m. on or about 10 June 1963 when there was a heavy wind blowing (c. 30 to 40 m.p.h.), and when it was raining, dark, and heavily overcast, he heard some banging noise on the lantern dome. On investigation he found a large injured bird lying on the balcony which, in his own expressive words, "was made short of for a good feast". In accordance with my instructions he was considerate enough, unlike Old Father William and his goose, to spare the bones and the beak which were later sent to me for identification. This was just as well, since the description of the bird contained in his letter had only served to lead me completely off the scent! The remains were those of a young Openbill Stork, and this gives rise to some pertinent reflections. The Openbill has always been considered to be, and doubtless largely is, a "resident" bird, moving about only locally with the exigencies of the monsoon and resultant water conditions. But it will be recalled that three Openbills ringed as nestlings in Bharatpur in September/October of different years have been recovered a few months later up to as much as 500 miles away from the place of ringing -- all in a due easterly direction. In these cases the journeys cannot be accounted for by shortage of water since it was soon after the monsoon -- in the cold weather -- before the ponds and jheels had commenced to dry up. Two explanations suggested themselves: 1) that the young of this stork are given to widespread wandering after they leave the nest in the same way as young

Grey Herons, 2) that the species is subject to regular migratory movements as yet unrecognized. In the first alternative the fact that all 3 recoveries were in exactly the same compass direction would have to be accounted as coincidences. The Sacramento bird could conceivably also come under the same category. But it is difficult to understand why a diurnal bird like the Openbill should be up and about on a dark and stormy night unless it was on routine migration. And this, I understand, is not an isolated instance. The Openbill along with many other diurnal species, believed to be of sedentary habit, are frequently reported to fly into lights at lighthouses and other "strategic" points inland during overcast weather on dark monsoon nights, e.g. Jatinga in Assam (see Newsletter 2(1):9-11; January 1962). What are such birds up to?

All this suggests that we have still much to learn about the spatial movements of our resident birds. Though these may be less extensive and spectacular than true migration as commonly understood, they are nevertheless of very great interest. Lighthouse keepers are in a particularly favourable position to supply useful data, and it is to be hoped that the appeal for their cooperation will prove increasingly fruitful.

Sálim Ali

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SOME NOTES ON THE NESTING AND NEST BEHAVIOUR OF A
PAIR OF REDVENTED BULBULS

Recently, a pair of Redvented Bulbuls appropriated an unfinished nest of Jungle Babblers. Three broods were raised in it, presumably by the same pair.

Late in March 1963, I watched Jungle Babblers building this nest in a Variegated Lemon bush on my lawn, at a height of about five feet. I thought the bush was too small and too exposed for the Jungle Babbler's nest. The babblers, for some reason, deserted the nest when it was a rather untidy shallow cup. On April 7, a Redvented Bulbul was carrying fine rootlets to this nest. Its mate kept it company, back and forth, but did not take part in either collecting the material, or building the nest. In the case of whatever nest-building by Redvented Bulbuls I have watched, it is only one bird (presumably the female) that collects the material and builds the nest, while its mate accompanies it and excellently looks after the security arrangements. I have seen it chasing and diving at crow-pheasants, tree-pies, and crows, even when these were at least fifty feet away from the nest.

As the nest cup was already there, the material collected was used only for lining it. On April 11 there were three eggs in it -- pale pink with red-brown markings. I think incubation starts with the laying of the first egg as these hatched on three consecutive days, on the early mornings of 18, 19, and 20th April. On the 20th evening, as I gently pulled the branch (which held the nest at its base) to have a look at the chicks, their heads shot up on trembling scraggy necks, they opened their mouths wide, and silently begged for food. They had not yet learnt to distinguish between a parent and an intruder. They were naked and blind. Their eyes open perhaps 5-7 days after hatching. Both parents took turns to feed the young ones. To begin with they brought tiny insects, later I saw butterflies (which looked like Plain Tigers but are very likely to be female Danaid Eggflies which are excellent mimics of the Plain Tiger), green grasshoppers, and grubs, etc. shoved down the throats of the chicks. The butterflies were given whole -- wings and all! This food was supplemented with small berries, green as well as ripe. The female (?) brooded the chicks at night; when they grew up to fill the nest, it spent the night at the edge of the nest, crouching low. No sound came from the chicks at feeding time for the first few days, but this

gradually elanged from a thin piping cry to a fearful din during the last few days. I was afraid the noise would attraet marauders. On the morning of May 1, all the three chicks had left the nest but were still in the same bush; the youngest stayed near the nest while the eldest was on the lowest branch. They looked very dumpy with diminutive tails and untidy fluffy plumage. Their wings were not fully developed, but adequate for short flights. By 11 a.m. some predator took the eldest chick. The second chick left the bush some time later, but the youngest spent the night in the same bush on a branch close to the nest. On May 2, after 9 a.m. the youngest chick left the lemon bush and made for a Bougainvillea creeper about 15 feet away, but landed on a flower-bed under it. For the next forty minutes it tried very hard to reach the centre of the Bougainvillea plant, thick with leaves and at a height of 5 feet, but failed to make it. One parent brought food twice when it first landed on the flower-bed, but food was withheld completely for the next 40 minutes though the parent tried in every way, by soft calls, by flying back and forth from chick to the plant to coax it to seek safety of the creeper. The other parent brought food to the second chick stationed in the same creeper and generally kept guard. By this time the chick in the flower-bed was quite exhausted and lay quietly, exposed to every danger. The first parent brought a big yellow lump of food -- some vegetable matter -- and fed the chick. But it was perhaps too tired and made no further attempt to fly. I was getting worried about its safety, so I walked up, spread the loose end of my sari over it, picked it up and put it in the Bougainvillea creeper. Both the parents were intensely agitated; one dived for my head, touching my forehead, the other landed on the ground, calling in a piteous note. I was happy to see them feed the chick a little later. The chicks were in that creeper during the rest of the morning, but by late afternoon, had moved on to a thick hedge about 25 feet away. I heard them calling from my neighbour's garden the next day but after that I neither saw nor heard them.

On May 7, I saw a Redvented Bulbul carrying nesting material to the same nest in the Variegated Lime bush! I think it was the same female, and it had lost its chicks. Had these survived I would certainly have seen or heard them. It again only lined the nest. Three eggs were laid on 11, 12, and 13th May. The last egg was laid about 5.50 in the morning. I was standing close to the bush supervising some work in the garden when I heard a peculiar soft sound from the bush and turning round saw the female sitting on the nest. It left in a while and the last egg was in the nest. Both the birds took turns at incubation, but I do not know which had the greater share.

On May 21, I heard a sharp distress call from the lemon bush, and from my window saw a crow-pheasant in the bush creeping towards the nest which was hardly a foot away. While the female sat on the nest, the male was hovering about the bush calling piteously all the while. I rushed out, and the crow-pheasant flew away pretty fast followed by both the birds which screamed and dived at it. Luckily the crow-pheasant did not pay a second visit. Once a crow landed on the lemon bush and I heard the distress call again and drove it out. The distress call of the Redvented Bulbul is different from the usual alarm call; it is a wail -- as if the bird is in acute physical pain.

I saw two chicks and one egg in the nest on May 23. I did not look at the nest on May 22, so I do not know if two chicks hatched on the same day or not. The last egg hatched on May 24. The chicks were fed and attended to as before.

My visits to the nest were mostly on the late evening so that I did not attraet the crows. As the nest was just above my eye level, I had to pull a branch a little to look inside. On May 29, at 5.50 p.m. as I gently pulled the branch, a parent female (?) dived straight at my head. I ducked instinctively and let go the branch. The bird landed on a branch right on top of the nest then slowly slid on to it, covering the chicks, hardly two feet away from my face! I left it in peace. On May 30, at the same time

in the evening, as I pulled the branch, a parent flew at me from the Bougainvillea creeper. I dived but it touched me lightly on the forehead with its wings. It immediately went back to the bush. I pulled the branch very gently a second time. It went for my head again, returned to the bush, sat on a branch about 18 inches from the nest, puffed up its feathers and started calling in a very agitated manner. I felt that it was calling more in anger than in fear. I began talking to it softly and held my palm about 8 inches from it meaning to stroke it. It looked as if it was going to jab at my palm. When my hand came still closer, it moved a few inches away. I did not have the courage to stroke it and left the place quietly. On May 31, very early in the morning, I saw the female brooding the chicks. I did not disturb it in the evening and at 7.20 p.m. it was sitting low at the edge of the nest. On June 1, late in the evening, as I slowly pulled the branch, I found only one chick in the nest. What had happened to the other two? Had they flown away or were they the victims of a marauder? The lone chick, as soon as it saw me, it jumped off the nest and landed on a lower branch. I was terribly sorry. I realized that it was not safe to inspect a nest at this late stage. The parents were furious and dived at me. They tried to coax the chick back to the centre of the bush. A little later, as I was coming to the lawn from the verandah and was still a few feet away from the nesting bush with no intention of prying into their private lives again, a bulbul dived straight at me and touched my forehead lightly! Evidently it recognized me as an intruder. Others who used that path just before and after me were not attacked! I had known of crows and Common Mynas recognizing a human intruder, but never expected such intelligency from a Redvented Bulbul. As it grew dark, the chick went a little further up the bush.

I left Delhi the next day, and when I returned on June 12 there were 3 eggs again in the same nest! So the chicks from the second clutch had not survived either. I had to leave Delhi again on June 15 and returned only on June 30. The nest was empty and there was no sign of any Redvented Bulbul chicks anywhere in the neighbourhood. In July, on two or three occasions I saw a Redvented Bulbul pull out some nesting material from this nest and fly away with it to my neighbour's garden.

I feel that since chicks were raised successfully in the first two attempts (though they did not survive the fledgling period) a third clutch was laid in the same nest. The chicks probably did not survive the nestling period so no further attempt was made to raise a brood there.

/As I write, a pair of Whitethroated Munias have taken possession of this deserted nest, and as the base is already there, they are adding a grass dome over it./

On May 2, when the last chick from the first clutch had left the lemon bush for the flower-bed about 15 ft. away, I accidentally discovered the strong nest attachment of a Redvented Bulbul for the empty nest. At 9.30 a.m. I walked to the lemon bush and was peeping at the empty nest when a parent screamed and landed on a branch of the bush hardly 3 ft. away from me, and started calling in great agitation! I left the place quite intrigued. At 10.30 a.m. I stood again in front of the bush and peeped into the nest. Again the bulbul was extremely excited, landed on the bush and called repeatedly. By that time the chick was safe in the shelter of the Bougainvillea plant where I had put it twenty minutes earlier. I withdrew from the scene but made two more trips to the nest at 11.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. and faced the same reaction from the bird. I visited the bush next at 5.30 p.m. The chicks by now had moved to a hedge about 25 feet away. The bulbul was greatly agitated to see me in front of the bush and called repeatedly, but did not come forward to defend the nest. I witnessed this nest attachment in another bulbul's nest. On May 7, another Redvented Bulbul began building a nest in a Hibiscus shrub in a very exposed position at a height of about 6 feet. A piece of white cellophane was incorporated into this nest. The first egg was laid on the morning of May 11; by 10 a.m. a crow had taken it.

No eggs were laid in it. On May 14, I was attracted by a Redvented Bulbul's alarm call and saw a crow approaching the nest. The bulbul called and behaved most excitedly to suggest that the nest was occupied. I was greatly puzzled and thought that the nest probably held eggs again. The crow approached the nest, looked inside and left without anything in its bill. I followed and found the nest empty indeed!

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

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CRAKE-WATCHING IN DELHI

The alarm clock rang at 4 a.m. I stumbled outside in the pre-dawn darkness to awaken the chowkidar, who then woke up the driver. Even though it was May it was cool enough at this hour to make us put on an extra shirt. After the driver and I had consumed some tea to wake us up we got in the car and drove south to Okhla, on a road that would soon be jammed with clamouring hordes of vehicles. Now the road was nearly deserted, except for sleepy villagers slowly cycling their cans of milk into the city. In the steely dawn light we could see House Crows, which had roosted overnight in the city trees, beginning to stream into the countryside for their daily depredations, apparently using the tree-lined roadway as an 'avenue' as they flew.

At Okhla we turned to follow the dirt road that ran alongside the Agra Canal, and stopped beside the 3/4 milepost (3 miles, 4 furlongs south of Okhla), the same area where large numbers of migrating wagtails had been found roosting earlier in the month (see 'The Search for Migratory Bird Roosts in Delhi and Bharatpur', Newsletter 2(6):1-4; June 1962).

After walking about 50 metres over a ploughed field I came to a small bluff overlooking at cattail (Typha) marsh. Because the water level had dropped during the dry season, there was a small mudflat exposed among the cattails, forming a stage where the crakes would display themselves as I sat on the bluff.

The discovery of this crake area had been quite accidental. The sharp eyes of Reed Pinfrock noticed the movement of a strange bird in the reeds as we struggled through the thick mud one day, looking for snakes and turtles. A closer look (in fact, the bird was collected for verification) revealed a shy Ruddy Crake (Amaurornis fuscus) — a new bird record for Delhi!

As the stars began to disappear I could see dark shapes darting nervously about on the mudflat. The Ruddy Crakes are only about the size of a myna, but their slender red legs, equipped with long-toed feet, help the bird get about on mud and weeds. From a distance they appear uniformly olive-brown above and paler below, but a close look may reveal an ashy-white throat. They are fairly shy, but when startled they will run for cover, with fluttering wings, rather than take off and fly.

I only saw the Ruddies early in the morning, which is the main reason I had to get up at such a terrible hour if I wanted to see them as they turned over sticks and leaves to pick up snails, spiders, and other small animals. With each step the Ruddy jerks its tail, like the Whitebreasted Waterhen.

While they were feeding, the Ruddies appeared to be rather silent. There were other noises coming from the reeds, especially the calls of crow-pheasants, moorhens, and Whitebreasted Waterhens, which made it difficult for me to single out a Ruddy's call. But I did see and hear one bird emit a short chuck, on a descending scale.

On one of these early morning visits a new bird made its appearance on the mudflat, alongside the Ruddy Crakes, Purple Moorhens, and Painted Snipe. This bird was several times bulkier than the Ruddy — almost the size of a

Whitebreasted Waterhen, which is in the same genus. This strange, brown crane turned out to be, of all things, a Brown Crane (*Amaurornis akool*) -- still another new bird record for Delhi! The Brown Crane is dark olive above, while the sides of the head and the underparts are bluish grey. The throat is white.

Two new birds in such a short period of time was enough stimulus to inspire me to look for other crakes (family Rallidae) in the Delhi area, but my efforts were futile.

A very handy guide to Indian waders is Frank Finn's HOW TO KNOW THE INDIAN WADERS (1920). This paperbacked, pocket-sized book (200 pages, 24 illustrations) deals with storks, ibises, spoonbills, herons and bitterns, egrets, flamingos, cranes, rails, bustards, plovers, sandpipers, snipe, and jacanas. Two years ago the book was still available from the publishers, Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta, for about Rs5/-. Careful searching might also reveal a copy of the book concealed in the musty corner of a neighbourhood bookstall. Although many of the scientific names have been changed, the common names conform fairly well with current usage.

There are eight species of rails and crakes generally found in political, continental India. Some of them are year-round residents, while others breed north of India and spend the winter with us. It is fascinating to think of these birds, normally very reluctant to fly, as migrating hundreds, if not thousands, of miles.

I have seen very few of the Indian rails and crakes (the common term 'rail' refers to those members of the Rallidae with long bills), but perhaps the very brief dichotomous key below will be of some use. A more complete, descriptive key may be published later, if the demand is sufficient. Any personal experiences relating to field identification of the Indian crakes and rails will certainly be welcomed in this Newsletter. Finding the birds is often the big problem, since they are rather secretive marsh dwellers. A careful search of marshy areas, particularly early in the morning during the dry season, may produce additions to your local and life lists. Besides, these same habitats are also ideal for bitterns, another secretive and interesting group of birds.

When observing crakes in the field, pay particular attention to: 1) size, 2) general colour, 3) presence or absence of white spots on the back, and white bars on the abdomen, and 4) whether the bill is long and slim or short and stout.

Key to the Rails and Crakes of peninsular India and Ceylon

(adult birds only)

All species below are resident locally throughout India and Ceylon, unless stated otherwise. Lengths are approximate

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|----|----|---|
| 1 | a. Bill long and slender | .. | .. | .. | 2 |
| | b. Bill short and stout | .. | .. | .. | 3 |
| 2 | a. White spots on back; abdomen barred with white. | | | | |
| | BLUEBREASTED BANDED RAIL. 10 inches | | | | |
| | b. No white spots on back; abdomen barred with white. | | | | |
| | WATER RAIL. 12 inches | | | | |
| | (Breeds only in Kashmir. Winters south to central India.) | | | | |
| 3 | a. With white streaks or spots on back and/or white-barred abdomens | .. | .. | .. | 4 |
| | b. No white bars or spots. Throat may be whitish | | | .. | 6 |
| 4 | a. No spots above, but abdomen barred black and white. | | | | |
| | BANDED CRAKE. 10 inches | | | | |
| | (Head, neck, and breast chestnut) | | | | |
| | b. Spotted above; abdomen barred with white | .. | | .. | 5 |

- 5 a. Lower plumage gray, legs greenish. Brown above.
SPOTTED CRAKE. 9 inches
(Winter only, south to Mysore)
- b. Lower plumage bluish or bluish slate, legs brownish flesh.
Brown above. BAILLON'S CRAKE. 7½ inches
(Breeds only in Kashmir, winters south to Ceylon.)
- 6 a. Large. Nearly size of Whitebreasted Waterhen.
BROWN CRAKE. 11 inches
(Breeds south to Andhra Pradesh and Mysore.)
- b. Small. About size of myna 7
- 7 a. Slate below, brown above.
ELWES'S CRAKE. 8 inches
(Nepal eastwards, apparently not migrating south in winter.)
- b. Pinkish chestnut below, brown above.
RUDDY CRAKE. 8½ inches
(Himalayas and the Gangetic Plain; also Bombay southwards
along Western Ghats, through Kerala to Ceylon.)

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ROOSTING TIME OF THE HOUSE SWIFT, APUS AFFINIS (G.E. GRAY)

While studying the factors influencing the selection of nestsite in the House Swift, Apus affinis, (Naik & Razack, Page 1, 1963, in press) I have spent a number of hours watching these birds flying over many parts of the M.S. University campus. There are a few buildings on the campus where these birds have established their colonies. During the early hours of the morning and in the evening they fly low in circles, remaining close to their respective colonies.

Towards the middle of February when the majority of their nests contain eggs, these birds keep on flying past their nesting places up to about 10 a.m., and then except for a few birds that remain in the nest to incubate eggs, most of the others gradually rise up higher and higher till they are no longer seen with the unaided eyes of the observer. I have not been able to ascertain whether at the high altitude they keep on flying over their breeding ground or more away from it; in fact very little is known about their movements and we have already initiated the study of this aspect. Wherever these birds might be at noon, they appear high above the resting ground in the late afternoon. At about 4 p.m. only a few birds become visible and then more and more birds appear, but still they keep on flying at a high altitude. By about 5.30 p.m. they descend and start flying past their colonies. Very soon after that they retire to their nests and at about 6.50 p.m. hardly any swift is seen flying over the campus. At this time bats take over the place of these birds in the air and start hawking insects.

While observing this routine day after day I noted that the birds in some colonies retire for the night earlier than those in the other colonies; the birds nesting in colonies situated very high (above the ground level) in exposed parts of tall buildings, roost later than those belonging to the colonies in dimly lit low buildings. If I quote my observation of 21st February, in a low building birds retired at 6.25 p.m., whereas in an adjoining tall building they retired at 6.40 p.m.

From these observations it appears that the intensity of light around nests

determines the roosting time of the House Swift. It gets dark around the colonies in low buildings (where the interior is dimly lit even during the day) somewhat early in the evening and consequently in these colonies birds are forced to retire early.

R. M. Naik

M.S. University, Baroda

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UNUSUAL VISITORS TO RANCHI, BIHAR

May 31, 1957, was an exceptional day for Ranchi City's Birdland. A mild Nor'wester the previous evening had made the weather cool and pleasant, otherwise there was nothing extraordinary. Yet at 4.30 a.m., the Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus) visited the grove near my house, and called for nearly two hours cuckoo cuckoo, very softly, in complete harmony with the dawn, hidden inside a clump of new peepal leaves. Surprisingly enough, as long as the Cuckoo called, the Koel did not intrude, though it is one of the earliest callers. The same evening, at 9.45 p.m., the Indian Cuckoo (Cuculus micropterus) also visited the grove, and called only twice utho-dekho, utho-dekho. Both left the same day.

Both these birds are found very close to Ranchi City; the Cuckoo lives in the jungles around Kalamati, 16 miles to the south on the Chaibassa Road, where probably it breeds; the Indian Cuckoo favours Horhap, 12 miles to the west on the Purulia Road. It is rather strange, that though I have lived for nearly 14 years here, that is the sole occasion on which I have known these birds to visit the city.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara

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SOME ODD BITS OF BIRD NEWS FROM RAJKOT

With the growth of the town, our campus which had been right on the outskirts of Rajkot, is now very much in the centre and the country is becoming more and more difficult of access from here. Fortunately, we have had a full decade of tree planting, and so there is a lot of shade and this naturally attracts quite a variety of birds. Unfortunately there are too many crows around and this is something that is a serious obstacle to the breeding birds. On tall neem trees which form a stately rank on the western edge of the central quadrangle, we have had Black Ibis successfully raising broods, and it is nice to have them around as they add an exotic air to the place, though one would wish they had sweeter voices! A pair now have a nest but nothing has come of it, as one of the eggs had been blown out by wind, which is such a constant feature of our climate here, and the second one hatched, only to have the nestling fall out and die. The parents are still about and they will no doubt breed again. The other morning when all the boys had gone for their morning P. T., one of them was probing in the grass of the flooded lawns.

Tailor Birds are increasing in numbers because of new hedges of crotons and other large and decorative leaved plants, and in fact I had a nest of a pair on my terrace in a potted plant. Crag Martins, are regular breeders and they build their nests of mud pellets against wooden rafters of most frequented corridors of the school and with fearless swoops, snap up flies and mosquitos from close over heads of people passing under. Two pairs have eggs and when off duty, they are seen speeding low over the lawns.

We are at the moment laying new grass and so there is a good deal of turning up of soil. This exposes an inordinate number of queen termites, and so the gardeners are attentively waited upon by a pair of mynas, one of

which has its right leg damaged. This particular bird and its mate have been regularly having their breakfast with me for the last four years.

While writing about Crag Martins, I should have mentioned a thing I saw this (5th September) evening. A rather stout and well-fed pigeon alighted on the ground in front of the corridor, where the pair of martins had elected to have their home, and to my surprise and to the discomfiture of the pigeon, one of the little birds swooped down with deadly accuracy onto the head of Columba. This swoop not having had required result, was followed by another and yet another attack and the pigeon flew off with undignified haste. I was surprised that a crag martin should have shown such belligerency towards a pigeon, as these vegetarians are so harmless and should rouse no ire among their neighbours; why then this determined assault? Incidentally crag martins collect their nest linings of feathers, by snapping them up in the air, as they rise up on playful air eddies, or alight on the ground beside one and pick it up with a quick peck of the beak and then flying off straight to the nest. House Swifts collect all their feathers on the wing, and I have yet to see one miss its quarry. Can this be surprising when one remembers that swifts feed on minute, fast-flying insect prey? It is like showing astonishment at a sharp shooter knocking down a barnyard fowl with a shotgun.

My July notes to the Newsletter were dismally prophesising a famine, but fortunately, there have been quite good rains during August and in all we have received 17 inches to date (5th Sept.). The lakes are still low, but things are not desultory as they were. Weather conditions look favourable and in the next few days there is all likelihood of heavy rain.

How right Prof. K.K. Neelakantan is when he says that the best place to watch birds is the home garden. His advice can be followed by all of us and the soundest foundations are laid if birds of the backyard and the front garden are enjoyed, rather than by making special trips to special places, as these are not easy to organize, nor are they always at short enough intervals to sustain interest, and to improve the powers of observation (a prime necessity in bird-watching) which constant practice can give. In the heart of Rajkot, at a stone's throw from my desk, I have had Indian Pittas, and Pelicans soar overhead, while two days ago, an Indian Nightjar entered one of the dormitories, and was lodged for the day in a cardboard carton, to be let off after dusk, while each night Stone Curlew frequent the paying fields and their wailing calls are a familiar night sound. Little Spotted Owlets enter dormitories, no doubt after chafers and crickets, and even Large Grey Babblers have wandered among the beds using mosquito net rods as they would dense bushes and tangled undergrowth. Magpie Robins, Black Redstarts, and Redbreasted Flycatchers are regular winter visitors to our not very sylvan grounds, while a Short-toed Eagle uses particularly tall cork tree as its launching tower. Peregrines, Lag-gars, and Hobbies pay us dashing visits to cause a stir among the otherwise placid pigeon population, while Indian Tree Pipits are a regular feature of shaded paths on spring migration. One March, the playing fields were invaded by large flocks of wheeling Short-toed Larks. Every morning after the boys have gone in for their classes, the abandoned grounds are the feeding grounds of Whitebacked Munias, Red Turtle Doves, Ring Doves, and Little Brown Doves. Peafowl are plentiful and even raise broods on our water tanks. A Grey Drongo haunts the larger trees in winter, and Black Drongos have built in a scraggy teak. After all the best birds, like the best people are those around home; common, everyday individuals. True indeed it would be exciting to meet a fur smothered Eskimo, or a be-feathered Red Indian Chief, and I would never miss a giant Watasi or a fierce-visaged cannibal from New Guinea, but for everyday companionship, the ones to turn to are those people that share our daily lives, the same is true of birds. How do you do Mr. Sparrow? Here he comes in with his cheeky airs and his trailing beakload of strings. I long to see a resplendent Bird of Paradise, but would he share my home like this commonplace sparrow!

K. S. Lavkumar

THE GOSHAWK. By T.H. White. pp. 158. Penguin Modern Classics. First published by Jonathan Cape 1951. Now published in Penguin Books 1963. Price 3s.

The Goshawk; Accipiter gentilis, has been traditionally used by falconers for sport. It is according to Ripley (SYNOPSIS) an Holarctic breeding species wandering south in winter to Northern Africa, NW. Himalayas, Northern Mexico, and Southern U.S.A.

T.H. White has written a superb book describing his attempts minute by minute to train the bird named Gos to become a successful and obedient hunter. The principle is simple. The master has to walk about with the bird on the wrist day and night for the first 80 or 90 hours until the bird driven to desperation by lack of sleep submits to the will of the master and agrees to undergo the process of education. But it is only a very determined falconer who can put up with the strain of this initiation. It is a fascinating story "the record of an intense clash of wills in which the pride and endurance of the wild raptor are worn down and broken by the almost insane will power of the schoolmaster falconer".

In modern democratic socialistic India it may be difficult for any one to find the time and the opportunity for falconry. In the days of kings and princes falconry was a respectable pastime. But it may come into its own again. The menace of birds to aircraft on some aerodromes has resulted in hawks being employed to keep the runways and approach areas clear of larks and other birds. Perhaps this is a function for which our Accipiters should be employed.

Z.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The study projects which we have launched so far about collecting data on the migration of Rosy Pastors and the life history of the House Sparrow have not yielded much result. A few odd notes have come in, but much more information is required and it is hoped that readers will take a more serious interest in these studies, and fill up their note books with useful data. Please refer back to Newsletters 1(4):4; 1961 and 3(2):1-3; 1963 in case the questions formulated for the enquiries have been forgotten.

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It is now time to start thinking of the 3rd Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India, which is the formal 'owner' of this Newsletter. Our membership is growing steadily, and we have now got members in the U.K., U.S.A., Africa, Malayasia, and India. The Newsletter goes out to about 400 persons, and it is hoped that all our readers who are not too far away from Bombay will attend the meeting in December, an announcement about which will be made in our November issue. A draft constitution of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India is being circulated herewith for your comments.

CORRESPONDENCE

Purplerumped Sunbird - Nesting Season

The nesting season of the Purple-rumped Sunbird (Cinnyris zelonica) is described as 'chiefly December to April and evidently intermittent throughout the year' (Sálim Ali). On 11.8.1963 a sunbird's nest was seen on a Phyllanthus emblica tree, rather conspicuously located among the light foliage. The nest was comparatively flimsy and very matter of fact. No birds were seen anywhere nearby. Besides the period being the month of August, with frequent rains of the receding SW. monsoon and with all the accompanying adversities for breeding led me to think that this nest was a deserted one. But on feeling the inside of the nest with fingers, to my surprise it was found to contain two eggs. Later on, on several occasions

the female bird was seen incubating both during day and night. I was curious to know of the future of the brood in such an adverse season. But to my dismay on 25.8.1963 early morning, by about 6.30 a.m. a jungle crow had broken off the twig from which the nest was suspended and was seen pulling open the nest placing it on top of a near-by compound wall. By the time I reached the spot the crow had already opened up the pouch portion of the nest and eaten off the eggs.

It is clear from the above that the Purplerumped Sunbird do breed in the month of August. Will any of our readers write if they have come across similar observation?

N.R. Nair, Trivandrum

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Peaceful Co-existence

Not long ago it was said that only birds and fools fly. Since then man's supremacy in the air has been established. This poses a problem to the Traffic-Law makers of the world to ensure safety from collisions. The old rule that a powered aerodyne shall always give way to a non-powered one is no longer adequate. Besides, in the event of an aeroplane and a bird having an argument in the air it is likely that both parties will come to grief.

But for a bird to claim priority and right of way on the ground is something I had never come across in my flying career.

Flying a scheduled service in a Viscount, we had just landed at an aerodrome in northern India, when I was asked to clear the runway and turn on to a taxi-track to proceed to the terminal building. There was a lot of grass on either side of the track. Suddenly, ahead of me I saw Mother Quail followed by four or five (I do not remember the exact number) chicks in single file, starting to cross the track. The distance between us was fast closing, but mother quail was not bothered. She was calmly and surely crossing the track as if I did not exist at all. As the quail train was crossing from right to left, I gave way to her (not that I would have killed her otherwise).

P.B.B.

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Comments on 'How Birds Fly' - Newsletter 3(8)

The article provided very interesting reading. But I would like to point out to Shri S.V. Nilakanta that apart from the birds, bats (Chiroptera) also fly in the real sense, as distinguished from the glidings of the flying squirrels etc. Will Shri Nilakanta elucidate as to how far his aerofoil theory of flight can be applied to the bats.

N.R. Nair, Trivandrum

[To Shri N.R. Nair's question, I can only say that when I had accidentally caught a number of bats last month, I particularly noticed that the wings of bats reminded me of the pictures of aircraft that men built in their earliest attempts to fly. Slender ribs used to be covered with cloth to make wings with a distinctly convex upper surface. The skin stretched on the curved finger bones of the bat has a distinct convex upper surface.

As bats fly in bad light, and the wing movements are rapid, I must confess that I have never been able to observe their flight characteristics.

Numerous insects also fly. Mostly their wing beat is an almost invisible blur of activity. Frankly, observation of all this is beyond the scope of the average birdwatcher.

S.V. Nilakanta

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NEWSLETTER
FOR
BIRDWATCHERS

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REGULAR SLAUGHTER OF THE INDIAN PITTACEY CROWS

Sri V. Ravi, Founder-President of the Nature Study Club, Guntur, has devoted No. 8 of their Club Bulletin (September 1963) to an interesting account and discussion of the slaughter of Indian Pittas by crows. In my capacity as a Regional Editor of the Newsletter, I am forwarding to you a gist of the article with my comments.

The first Pitta seen by Sri Ravi was a bird which, in May 1960, sought refuge within his house from a number of crows. This bird managed to escape, but was pounced upon and carried away by a Pariah Kite as soon as it alighted on a roof. Next summer another fugitive from crows was released late in the evening only to be picked up dead the next morning, 'killed by crows'. A few days later Pitta feathers were found by other members of the Club. On 20 April, they discovered a Jungle Crow plucking and devouring a Pitta. Three days later a Pitta was found lying dazed at the foot of a staircase. Sri Ravi managed to revive the bird, but, finding the ungrateful creature trying to injure itself in its desperate bid for freedom, he releases it. The moment it emerged into the open, a Jungle Crow caught it and carried it away. On two more occasions crows were found pursuing or eating Pittas.

Sri Ravi wonders why well-known bird books do not mention that the Pitta is 'subject to constant slaughter.' He would like to know whether crows elsewhere in India show a similar fondness for the flesh of the Pitta.

Sri Ravi points out that the Pitta is seen by them in that locality only when, as a 'refugee', it seeks shelter within their houses (and that only in summer).

On reading Sri Ravi's interesting note, it occurred to me that the Pitta might be just a bird of passage in that particular locality. Many of our resident birds react unfavourably to the appearance of an uncommon bird in their midst. Crows, in particular, are quick to notice a 'stranger', especially when the stranger happens to be a little too flashily attired like the Pitta. On innumerable occasions I have watched flocks of crows, shrieking like the Furies,

driving immature Serpent-Eagles and Hawk-Eagles from pillar to post when they seemed to ignore adults of the same species. The only provoking circumstance on such occasions seemed to be the unfamiliar garb of the juvenile eagles.

Sri Ravi suggests that crows probably come across Pittas only during those periods when the Pitta comes out of thick cover to begin its journey to its breeding grounds. Perhaps the Pitta's skulking ways and fondness for thick cover make it appear a 'stranger' to the crow whenever the Pitta makes a public appearance. As birds which have just started their return journey to their breeding grounds are normally strong and healthy, there is little reason to believe that the Pittas which fall a prey to crows were emaciated specimens.

In Madras city and its suburbs the Pitta not infrequently enters houses in the winter months. But so far as I can remember there was nothing to suggest that they were seeking asylum from crows or other predatory creatures. We used to assume that such birds were entering buildings for the sake of warmth.

I have come across dead Pittas twice. Once, nearly 20 years ago in Madras, very near a house; then, 3 or 4 years ago at Chittur, Kerala. Both these birds were picked up dead in places where crows abounded, but apparently no crow had thought of making a meal of them. In Palghat I have found Pittas boldly moving about in open places inside wooded compounds in the morning hours, and, on cloudy days, even at noon. I do not now remember whether any crows were present close by. Though the Pitta spends much of its life within thick scrub, I have found that it is not particularly afraid of man. I have very vivid recollections of the capers I cut, as a boy, trying to catch Pittas which looked as though they were too stupid to move away when approached.

Some years ago a friend told me that in certain parts of Kerala boys catch Pittas with the greatest of ease using traps made of the ribs of coconut leaves. The bait it seems is invariably a dry red chilli-pod.

The people of Kerala have originated so few legends connected with birds that I must add also that one of these legends concerns the Pitta. We have a popular saying which means that the Pitta is the last stage in the metamorphosis of the tadpole! Less imagination may be, but much less incredible than the legend of the 'Barnacle' goose!

K.K. Neelakantan,
Ernakulam.

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BIRDS OF THE HIMALAYAN CULTIVATION

In the Himalayas, till 3000 ft., the birdlife is not appreciably different from that of the adjoining plains. But it is above this altitude that its composition starts changing. It is a thrill to recognise the hill species, and the first to be seen are the Himalayan Redvented Bulbuls, which though like the plains birds, are larger and very much darker, with the ear-coverts standing out very distinctly lighter than the smokey head. As usual they are about in pairs following each other with much chortling and chattering. Alongside them daintier White-eared Bulbuls become common among shrubberies and remain familiar right up to 7000 ft. in pairs with their jaunty crests curled forwards, and a sulphur-yellow patch on the vent. They are very confiding birds, and as they make no attempt at being circumspect while going to and from their nests, whether in the process of construction, or containing fledglings, they are very easy to locate. These bulbuls are certainly extremely bold and confiding towards humans.

Collared Bushchats are summer visitors and are seen perched on telegraph wires, or on the tops of small bushes or some tall stalk in ploughed fields, scanning the terrain for moving insect prey. Male Collared Bushchats are very easy to identify; they are sparrow-sized birds, have a very bolt upright stance, and the dark brown head and light orange breast, are set off

by two white crescents on the sides of the neck. The little hen is just one among those small brown birds that prove so enigmatic to most people, but the general size and shape and habits suggest the identity. These little chats are very common throughout the plains of India during winter in farmland. Sitting also on wires, or bushes, and on rocks, and trilling a love song are male Crested Buntings belonging to the seed-eating fraternity. The male is conspicuous by erect crest, overall black plumage and bright chestnut wings, the same colour scheme as sported by the Coucal. The females are brown, but recognizable by the same erect crest as of her spouse. These buntings are birds particular to hill country throughout India and are plentiful in the lower valleys, especially if these are rocky and dry, and they are very common cage-bird on sale in all bird markets. I do not think they make good cage-birds as they need a very insectivorous diet, and in their natural state must be playing a very important role in keeping down pests.

It would be wrong to neglect the Common Sparrows which are plentiful everywhere around villages, for there is every likelihood of some of them being Cinnamon Tree Sparrows. The little cocks of the latter species have the same colour pattern as that of the ubiquitous relative, but the upper parts are a bright cinnamon, while quite often in brightly coloured males, the lower parts are suffused with yellow. Very attractive birds indeed. In the truly temperate farmsteads with rose hedges and young spring wheat, one sees the Dark Grey Bush Chat. It has the same habit as the Collared Bush Chat, but the birds are larger, and the male is a dark grey above, with a prominent white wing bar, and white underparts. It sits perched on bushes and where there are telegraph wires, on the wire stays, scanning the ground in bushchat-fashion for prey. The female is again one of those brown birds of nondescript nature, but once familiarity has been gained with the call and mannerisms of the male, it is not difficult to identify her. I have found it very difficult to locate a Dark Grey Bushchat's nest, so well is it concealed under some bush. Another bird seen on bush-tops and along telegraph wires eyeing the ground is the familiar plains bird, the Rufous-backed Shrike. The shrikean bill and the broad black line through the eye are prominent pointers and when the bird takes off, flying low over the ground on fast beating wings, the rufous on the lower back is very distinct. This is an expert mimic and leads many a gullible birdwatcher up a mountain path, which is certainly more taxing than any proverbial garden path.

On the grassy verges of terraces, we find the Brown Hill Warbler. It is brown; it has a very long tail in proportion to its sparrow-sized body, the upper parts are heavily streaked with darker brown, but what is most diagnostic is its trilling and repetitive call uttered from an exposed perch -- a sort of breathless chirrup-chirrup-chirrup and on and on and on, and as the bird calls it turns its head from one side to the other producing a ventriloquist effect. When it flies, the long tail keeps on unbalancing it and so it all looks very ungainly and dangerous. The warbler wisely keeps to its cover and is never to be found anywhere else but among grass and shrubs.

Commonly seen around bushes and hedgerows are small babbler-like birds. They are a rich brown and seen from close quarters, the whitish streaking is visible. They hop about on the ground, turning leaves and debris in search of lurking insects and all the time the tail is flickered and the birds chatter and murmur to one another. Disturbed, they simply dodge around the bush and are in an instant gone. When they fly their rounded tails show a pale edging. These are Streaked Laughing Thrushes, and are a fitting introduction to a large and assorted family of birds typical of the Himalayas.

Rounding a bend on the road, one might put up a rabble of small green and black birds which fly off in Munia-fashion uttering a jingling cry of alarm. These are Himalayan Green Finches -- very charming members of that seed-cracking family.

The House Crow of the plains is replaced by the totally black Jungle Crow which is found in all types of country from the foothills right up to the cool coniferous forests, where it gives way to a very similar species, the Carrion Crow. These two mountain crows are not easy to identify in the field.

Golden Orioles are inordinately common in company with the lovely Paradise Flycatchers, both familiar to any one least interested in birdlife, in the lower reaches of the valleys and they stray up to 6000 ft. But by far the most colourful bird, especially on the edges of Chir pine forests is the Blueheaded Rock Thrush. It perches on telegraph wires, or on a lower branch of a tree. The male is chestnut below, with a bright blue crown. There are prominent white 'mirrors' in the wings. The bird is about the size of a myna. Every now and then it volplanes off its perch uttering a piercing chee chee chee, and it glides down. This is a very familiar sound of the middle altitudes of the Himalayas. Equally common are the rabble of noisy Black Bulbuls, slim dark blue-grey birds, with untidy crested black heads and red bills. The tails are slightly forked giving them on a superficial glance the appearance of a Grey Drongo.

Grey Drongos are fairly plentiful on the edges of pine forests, while in the cultivation, Black Drongos so common on the plains are seen, at times even as high up as Manali. Flocks of Ashyheaded Parakeets hurtle from one grove to another, uttering their rasping screams as they go.

The Common Myna is met with well up to 7000 ft., and I was surprised to see a pair of them in most unlikely country at Deoban, Chakrata well above this height, striding confidently on green slopes shrouded in the Himalayan mists. In Manali, they are plentiful as here in Rajkot, but I thought they had a slight difference of voice. Jungle Mynas can be easily confused with this species, and they are very plentiful in the mountains. The absence of the yellow, bare skin round the eyes and a prominent tuft of feathers over the bill make them recognisable. They go around in loose flocks and breed in crevices in masonry of bridges and retaining walls. They are less conceited than their common relatives.

The Himalayan Tree Pie is quite familiar with its raucous call and replaces here the Indian Tree Pie of the plains. It is unmistakable with its long grey tail, tipped with black and the fact that its arrival is often received with much scolding and agitation by smaller birds. Another long-tailed member of the crow family which is seen quite frequently as the altitude increases, are the graceful Blue Magpies. They go about in pairs or small parties, and their long, curved tails trailing behind make them very conspicuous and easy to identify. They are a little smaller than crows, and are blue above, with a black head, and white breast and abdomen, there are some white feathers down the nape.

The Himalayan Whistling Thrush is a part of the Himalayan scene and is difficult to miss as pairs vigorously chase one another, while their rambling tune is never stilled. I have described this bird in detail in one of the earlier numbers of the Newsletter, and will not say anything more about them. However, I am very fond of this thrush, as he is everywhere a companion, from the foot of the mountains to the edges of the snow fields, and even in the fiercest gorges he enlivens the scene.

Phayals, Franklin's Wren Warblers -- small waifs chattering among the thickets. Grey Tits and Purple Sunbirds are all familiar and even an odd Green Bee-eater might dash across the path to snap up a dragonfly.

The Indian Cuckoos are heard throughout the day and with the last Koel calling from far below, the double cuckoo-cuckoo of this gay freelance is a pleasant sound of fair weather. Rounding a turn, one looks over a sheer precipice down up to great vultures gliding up on outstretched wings, a pair of White Vultures, several dark iron-grey Whitebacked Vultures, and a lone King Vulture with pointed wings held at a slight V over its back, its head a bright red and a white spot flashing on either flank as it banks into a spiral higher and higher towards one. Larger than all these and with very squarecut wings, several cream coloured Himalayan Griffons circle majestically, while above glides, larger than them all, the Bearded Vulture on motionless wings, its tapering tail conspicuous from the square ones of the others, and as it approaches a buzzing noise is audible, a hum of air passing through the stiffly held primaries.

Hawking insects are flocks of twittering swallows with pale reddish rump patches. These are the Redrumped Swallows. They build their inverted, mud

'igloos' under rock ledges or culverts. Swifts on quivering wings speed past with graceful mastery of the air. There are several types of swifts in the mountains from the large and dashing Spinetail to small, brown Edible-nest Swiftlet. Our familiar House Swifts are also plentiful.

By now the new comer will have heard many a strange song, and seen many a new form or flash of colour and motion, and before long he will be seeing and recognising red and black liveried Minivets, scarlet-crested woodpeckers of several species, industrious and acrobatic tits, and garrulous bands of laughing Thrushes. If he has failed to bring along his book on hill fauna, he will be softly cursing his thoughtlessness, but this should not deter him from looking at the interesting new birds he meets; by jotting down careful notes and trying his hand at amateurish sketching, he will be able to identify all the new introductions on getting home. Whenever I am thus handicapped, I have always resorted to this practice, and I have named a strange warbler after a fictitious Jannadas and later identified my Jannadas's Warbler as the Black-faced Flycatcher Warbler while the Giddie Up Bird, named for its peculiar call, turned out to be the Black-and-Yellow Grosbeak. The Usha bird named for my companion who pointed it out to me, was established after many fruitless and exasperating attempts as the Blackbrowed Flycatcher Warbler, and a very nondescript sketch of a crested bird, later helped me to list the Yellownaped Ixulus on my growing life-list. Several years after I had drawn a pair of dumpy little birds, BIRDS OF SHIKIM carried an illustration which helped me to place my birds as Fulvettas, and from the same source with the help of notes kept much earlier I learnt I had seen a Yellowbrowed Tit and a Great Slaty Woodpecker.

K.S. Iyankumar

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ALL DAY WATCH ON A MALE BAYA

Observations carried out in an all-day watch on the nest building and allied activities of the male Baya Weaver Bird (Ploceus philippinus) on May 22, 1955, at Doranda, Ranchi, in the State of Bihar.

Ranchi is 682.3 metres above sea-level, with mean maximum and minimum temperatures of 29.0° C. and 18.3° C., respectively. The absolute maximum and minimum are 43.5° C. in May, and 3.3° C. in January. The average annual rainfall is 1370 mm., the bulk of it from the SW. monsoon, but instability showers are fairly common. Though situated almost on the Tropic of Cancer (latitude 23° 12' N.), the hot weather is mitigated by the altitude. The longitude is 85° 18' E.

On the day of observation, the elements were, as recorded at 0830 hours on May 23: max. temp. 30.7° C., min. 25.5° C. Sunrise took place at 0516 hours, and sunset at 1828 hours.

Analysis

The observations started at 0500 extended over 13 hours 28 minutes. The bird actually left the nesting site at 1635, i.e. after 11 hours 25 minutes. Splitting the day into two halves, the forenoon was 7 hours (0500-1200), and the afternoon of 6 hours 28 minutes (1200-1828). In the forenoon the bird was absent for about 2 hours 22 minutes from the nesting site at different times. The longest stretch was from 0833-0932 and again from 1005-1100. During the 4 hours 38 minutes of its presence, the bird wove outside 25 times, inside 19 times, collected materials 31 times and displayed twice.

In the afternoon the tempo of work was very sluggish. Out of the 6 hours 28 minutes the bird was absent intermittently for as many as 5 hours 26 minutes. The longest gap was from 1345-1518 and from 1200-1343. In the 1 hour 2 minutes of presence at the nest, it wove outside 4 times, and collected materials only twice. There was no weaving inside or any display either.

The bird left the nest 1 hour 53 minutes before sunset. The roosting tree

is different but in the same ground. The bird returns to the nest very early in the morning. It was present when observations started at 0500.

Notes

The male was in full breeding plumage. On the day of observation, the nest in a date palm tree, was half complete. The tree was in the compound of the Junior conservator of Forests. All material was collected from the fronds of the same tree. The inside of the nest is woven out of the soft young leaves at the tops of the fronds, whereas for the outside the tougher and older leaves are used.

Record of observations at intervals of 5 minutes

As the record is too long to present, we reproduce only a sample of Mrs. Jamal Ara's 5 minute interval observations in the late afternoon. It is interesting to note that this was the day, when the male had half finished the nest, that a female moved in and took possession of it. -- Ed.

<u>Time</u>	<u>Habit</u>	<u>Weather</u>
1610	Flies off to a near-by <u>Cedrela toona</u> tree calling <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> occasionally, calls <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> six times before returning to the nest.	
1615	Still on nest calling <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> , after every half minute.	
1620	Still on nest, calls <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> thrice in one minute, and then <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> , <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> , <u>chee</u> , <u>chee</u> , <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> , <u>ho-jee-e-e-e</u> in another minute.	
1625	<u>Ho-jee-e-e-e</u> continues at intervals, then works on the nest inattentively, goes inside inspecting, calls 21 times during the next five minutes.	
1635	Flies away north.	
1725	Female comes to the nest silently, gets inside, sees all round carefully and then flies away after two minutes.	1700-1800 sunny, very hot, light breeze
1730	Female comes back, goes inside nest and then flies away, thereafter two females come, one goes inside the nest, the other sits on the top of the nest outside, inspecting carefully every side of the nest and then flies away, the one inside is still there.	
1735	Female still inside nest examining every corner carefully.	
1738	She flies away.	
1805	Six females come and all want to enter the nest, but the female arriving first drives them all away from vicinity of the nest, and a fight ensues on the date palm, no one dare enter inside, except perhaps the chosen future wife who is inside and drives all others away.	1800-1900 Cooling down, quite pleasant breeze, clear sky
1810	Fight continues, she has to fight three or four females single-handed at a time.	
1815	Fight continues, one inside is still there.	
1820	All females fly away, except the one who was in the nest, she too then flies away.	

The call ho-jee-e-e-e which is long drawn and in a descending scale, is more common than the other call, cheep-cheep.

(Mrs.) Jamail Ara

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MORE STRANGE FOODS OF THE CROW-PHEASANT

The variety of foods of the Crow-Pheasant reported by Mrs. Usha Ganguli on page 8 of the May issue, and by Sálim Ali on page 12 of the June issue, remind me of an unusual experience I had in New Delhi.

On 9 July 1961 I set a steel mammal trap under a hedge near my home, in the hope that I could collect a mongoose I had seen there. I used a piece of meat to bait the trap, which was a special type known as a 'Conibear' trap, quite unlike the customary steel jaw traps.

For several days the trap lay untouched, and the meat quickly became putrid. Then on July 12th what should I find but a huge monitor lizard that, in its attempt to eat the meat, had triggered the trap, locking its head in a fatal grip. I removed the lizard and preserved it, then reset the trap, which was still baited with the same old piece of meat.

Three more unproductive days passed before I caught anything else in the trap -- and then it was a Crow-Pheasant! The concussion of the trap had killed the bird as it foraged in the brush, apparently when it, too, had tried to eat the six-day old meat.

This is certainly a novel way to collect birds, but I hardly recommend it as a common practice; one might collect a neighbour's dog.

I had to take up my trepline a few days later, and I still hadn't caught a mongoose.

J. P. Donahue

Dept. of Entomology, Michigan State
University, East Lansing,
Michigan, U.S.A.

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TWO BIRD COMMUNITIES

As a part of our training in the study of ecological distribution of birds, we recently undertook two excursions the account of which is given below. The two places -- Timbi and Makarpura -- visited by us in the Baroda Dist. represent two different types of habitat and harbour radically different bio-communities. The list of birds observed there illustrates the profound influence of habitat on the composition of avifauna.

Timbi is known for its irrigation dam. The chief vegetations are paddy and cotton. Round the catchment area of the lake, the land is not level as the surrounding fields under plough. A species of Capparis and some Cassias were the dominant shrubs near the catchment area. The tall reeds in the shallow regions of the lake were Cyperus sp. On the sides of the approach road were avenue trees, mostly cassias. A little away from the road were man-made ditches filled with rain water.

The ground in Makarpura palace is level and the vegetation includes both indigenous and exotic plants. Phoenix, Margosa, and Pithecolobium are some of the indigenous trees, while Bougainvillea shrubs represented in main the exotic plants. Artificially made caves in the area where His Highness used to keep his menageri, now lends shelter to quails. Unlike Timbi area

the palace woodland is well protected from shepherds collecting foliage and women felling branches to keep their pots boiling. As a result of this, crownless palms and trees with dry branches are plenty.

From the study of the above two localities, we could get an idea of the different habitats existing in the respective areas. Timbi offers a good collection of aquatic birds, on the other hand, Makarpura mostly terrestrial.

A list of the birds is appended below, and migrants are marked by (M).

Timbi, 4 August 1963

Time: 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.

1. Little Cormorant: Phalacrocorax niger
2. Cattle Egret, Bubulcus ibis
3. Little Egret, Egretta garzetta
4. Whitebacked Vulture, Gyps bengalensis
5. Demoiselle Crane, Anthropoides virgo (M)
6. Purple Moorhen, Porphyrio porphyrio
7. Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Hydrophasianus chirurgus
8. Common Snipe, Capella gallinago (M)
9. Redwattled Lapwing, Vanellus indicus
10. Ring Dove, Streptopelia decaocto
11. Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Vanellus malabaricus
12. Little Brown Dove, Streptopelia senegalensis
13. Pied Crested Cuckoo, Clamator jacobinus (M)
14. Large Green Bee-eater, Merops superciliosus (M)
15. Wiretailed Swallow, Hirundo smithii
16. Rufousbacked Shrike, Lanius schach
17. Golden Oriole, Oriolus oriolus
18. Bank Myna, Acridotheres ginginianus
19. Rosy Pastor, Pastor roseus (M)
20. Large Grey Babbler, Turdoides malcolmi
21. Indian Robin, Saxicoloides fulicata
22. Indian Pipit, Anthus novaezeelandiae
23. Whitethroated Munia, Lonchura malabarica
24. Black Drongo, Dicrurus adsimilis
25. Redvented Bulbul, Pycnonotus cafer

Makarpura, 7 July 1963

Time: 7 a.m. to 9.30 a.m.

- Cattle Egret, Bubulcus ibis
 Whitebacked Vulture, Gyps bengalensis
 Jungle Bush Quail, Perdica asiatica
 Spotted Dove, Streptopelia chinensis
 Little Brown Dove, Streptopelia senegalensis
 Roseringed Parakeet, Psittacula krameri
 Koel, Eudynamis scolopacea
 Crow-Pheasant, Centropus sinensis
 Redrumped Swallow, Hirundo daurica
 Goldenbacked Woodpecker, Dinopium benghalense
 Roller, Coracias benghalensis
 Rufousbacked Shrike, Lanius schach
 Black Drongo, Dicrurus adsimilis
 Brahminy Myna, Sturnus pagodarum
 Tree Pie, Dendrocyta vagabunda
 Common Iora, Aegithina tiphia
 Redvented Bulbul, Pycnonotus cafer
 Common Babbler, Turdoides caudatus
 Yelloweyed Babbler, Chrysomma sinensis
 Common Weaver Bird, Ploceus philippinus
 Purple Sunbird, Nectarinia asiatica
 Franklin's Wren-Warbler, Prinia hodgsonii
 Indian Robin, Saxicoloides fulicata
 Magpie-Robin, Copsychus saularis
 Whitethroated Munia, Lonchura malabarica

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to our teacher, Mr. A.R.K. Das who accompanied us on both these excursions.

N. Shivanarayanan, and M.I. Andrews,
Division of Avian Biology, Zool. Dept.
M.S. University, Baroda

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'WHERE DO SWALLOWS SLEEP?'

The query 'Where do Swallows sleep?' reproduced below would make interesting reading, especially to those readers who have taken part in ringing swallows and other migratory birds at their roosts under the WHO/BNHS Bird Migration Study Project. The query was by E.H. Aitken [EHA of natural history fame], and was published at p. 327 of the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society Vol. 8 (1894). It is dated Karwar, 17 August 1893, and reads:

"Can any of the members of the Bombay Natural History Society tell me where our Swallows sleep? In the cold season most parts of India swarm with Swallows, which perch in long rows on the telegraph wires, but not on trees, in the day-time. They are not on the wires at night, and I very much doubt their resorting to trees at that time. I think it likely that they sleep in company, like Bee-eaters; but though I have often startled a company of Bee-eaters from their roosting tree, I never startled a sleeping swallow. At one time I used to meet with large flights of Swallows circling over some flat-topped rocky hills after dusk, very near the ground. They were not hawk-ing insects, but evidently wanting to alight, either on the ground or on the low Cajoo-nut trees which grew on the hill. I watched them patiently several evenings, but it was very dark, and if I went near enough to follow their movements, they took fright at once and went off."

A query which baffled a naturalist like EHA seventy years back has now been unravelled by the activities of the WHO/BNHS Bird Migration Study Project. Apart from roosts of swallows, those of wagtails, Spanish Sparrows, Buntings, and Rosy Pastors have been located under the above Project, and their inmates ringed to learn of their migrations.

P.V. George, and J.S. Serrao

REVIEW

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA. By J.G. Williams. London 1963. Collins. pp. 271. Price 45s.

This is a beautifully illustrated and produced book, although it is by no means a luxury volume. It sets out to fill for Africa the same place that Salim Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS fills for us. The author finds himself embarrassed by the richness of the avifauna of the regions he has chosen. He ends his difficulties by deciding to write two books. The present volume which is the first of them, deals with those birds which are likely to be noticed by the non-expert birdwatcher; most of them are common and widespread and therefore likely to be observed by interested tourists. Some of the less common birds are included because their striking appearance or habits makes it probable that they will catch the eye of some tourist.

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In equating Mr. Williams's aims with those of Salim Ali, I have perhaps been unfair to him. Mr. Williams's sole aim is to help in the identification of the different birds. He makes no attempt to describe their nesting and other

species, and the black and white drawings of 280 more. The system of giving the size of the bird in inches seems to me less graphic and clear than Salim Ali's system of using well-known birds like the sparrow, bulbul, and myna as standards of measurement.

Mr. Williams assures in his readers a certain slight familiarity with bird-life. For the man who could not even make a guess about the family of the bird he wished to identify, using the present book would create some problems. It would be difficult to track down any bird with the help of this book unless the user already had some idea of where to look for it. This is specially true of those species which are illustrated only in black and white. Here comparison must once more be made with THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS. The tables where the species are classified and grouped under headings like Birds with prominent tails, Birds with prominent bills, Prominent Crests, Long Legs, etc., etc. are, I think, invaluable. They make identification easy and quick -- and in a book whose main purpose is to help in identification this is surely of primary importance.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

TIME magazine recently sent out a reminder to its subscribers in a language which would have been appropriate to our own Newsletter. A part of the text and the illustrations are reproduced below:



"Dear Subscriber:

"Maybe you've heard about TIME's affair with the birds. It began with an otherwise sober story in Science, where TIME's readers spotted a reference to an elusive Alaskan bird called the 'kristle-thighed curlew.'

"And before you could chirp 'ornithology' TIME's eagle-eyed readers had christened a flock of zany feathered friends. Some of them are shown above. I hope they give you a chuckle -- and I hope, too, that you will enter into the spirit of things and become my favorite bird of all time: The Swift-winged TIMEcatcher.

"The Swift-winged TIMEcatcher is a TIME reader who renews his subscription early enough to avoid turning into the most miserable bird in the forest -- the Sad-Eyed Regret -- the bird who waited too long and missed getting his copies of TIME."

BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA Annual General Meeting

The 1st Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India will be held at 4 p.m. on Saturday, 14th December 1963, at the office of the Bombay Natural History Society, at Sunrise, 91 Walkeshwar Road, Bombay 6. (It may be recalled that all subscribers to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers are deemed to be members of this Club.)

A g e n d a

1. To consider and approve the Draft Constitution of the Club circulated with the Newsletter for October 1963.

habits but confines himself to an account of each bird and its habitat. The identification is of course, helped by the coloured illustrations of 179 species, and the black and white drawings of 280 more. The system of giving the size of the bird in inches seems to me less graphic and clear than Salim Ali's system of using well-known birds like the sparrow, bulbul, and myna as standards of measurement.

Mr. Williams assumes in his readers a certain slight familiarity with bird-life. For the man who could not even make a guess about the family of the bird he wished to identify, using the present book would create some problems. It would be difficult to track down any bird with the help of this book unless the user already had some idea of where to look for it. This is specially true of those species which are illustrated only in black and white. Here comparison must once more be made with THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS. The tables where the species are classified and grouped under headings like Birds with prominent tails, Birds with prominent bills, Prominent Crests, Long Legs, etc., etc. are, I think, invaluable. They make identification easy and quick -- and in a book whose main purpose is to help in identification this is surely of primary importance.

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Agenda

1. To consider and approve the Draft Constitution of the Club circulated

2. To appoint Office Bearers for the ensuing year (January-December 1964).
3. To appoint an Editorial Board for the Newsletter for the ensuing year (January-December 1964).
4. To receive a report from Mr. Zafar Putehally about the finances of the Newsletter.
5. Any other business brought forward with the permission of the Chairman.

* * *

It will be appreciated if readers will send in their considered comments on the Newsletter and suggestions about the future activities of the BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA. These will be placed before the meeting. -- Ed.

CORRESPONDENCE

Bird notes from Rajkot, Gujarat

I was most interested to read, in the September issue of the Newsletter, of R.S. Lavkumar's note regarding the occurrence in Saurashtra of the Watercock or Kora (Gallicrex cinerea).

It strikes me that this is perhaps a rather more rare and important occurrence than many of our readers will appreciate.

Salim Ali failed to find the bird in either his Ornithological Survey of Kutch (BIRDS OF KUTCH, p. 107) or that which he made of the birds of Gujarat (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 52:411). In both these publications he mentions that Lester only came across the bird once in Kutch, when a pair, which were shot by H.H. the Maharao on the 4th July, 1897, were sent to him for identification.

Both Butler (A CATALOGUE OF THE BIRDS OF SIND, KUTCH, KATHIAWAR, NORTH GUJARAT, AND MT. ABU, p. 66) and Barnes (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 6:137) consider the bird to be found sparingly in Sind, but not at all in Gujarat.

Dharmakumarsinhji's (THE BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA, p. 156) says that the bird is non-resident and very rare in Saurashtra.

I personally have never come across it in the Kaira District of Gujarat nor have I heard of anyone else doing so.

The bird likes wet, swampy areas and it is evident that this corner of India is too arid for it, and that those birds which have been seen were rare vagrants.

S.K. Reeves,
Epsom, Surrey, U.K.

* * * *

Purplerumped Sunbird

To Mr. N.R. Nair's note regarding the breeding season of the Purplerumped Sunbird in your October issue, I should like to add a few remarks, especially as he has asked for comment.

Some years ago, in late August or early September, I used to watch a pair of Purplerumped Sunbirds tending their solitary fledgling in a nest precariously hanging from a branch of the hedge. One day, after a heavy downpour the expected disaster took place: the nest had fallen to the ground spilling the contents. My wife carefully replaced the little bird in its nest and fastened the nest securely to the bougainvillea, where the parents continued to perform their duty of feeding their baby.

Amin Tyabji,
Bombay

* * * *

Recovery of ringed birds

In reading Dr. Salim Ali's note, in the September issue of the Newsletter I was struck by his saying, in the footnote, that the Marsh Sandpiper (Tringa stagnatilis) in its winter quarters in India, keeps mainly to the sea coast.

and is hardly ever seen inland.

I can find no support for this in the literature whatever, in fact it seems to point in the opposite direction.

Stuart Baker (FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds, 2nd ed., Vol. 6, p. 216) says: 'This little sandpiper is not so much of a seashore bird as most of its family, keeping much to inland lakes and swamps....'

Dharmakumarsinhji (THE BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA, p. 188) says: 'This is a common wader which is seen on streams and stagnant pools. In the countryside it is found mostly during winter.....', and again, 'The Marsh Sandpiper is more of an inland bird, generally seen singly or in small groups though it may gather in larger numbers on the sea coast, tidal pools, and salt pans.'

Finally, Dr. Salim Ali, himself, having described the bird as a winter visitor to Kutch, says (BIRDS OF KUTCH, p. 131): 'Seen singly or in scattered twos and threes on the swampy edges of puddles and jheels, often wading into the shallows. Rarely on saltwater puddles and practically never on the seashore.'

On four occasions in the winter of 1957-8, I saw either singletons or small parties of two to five birds of this species at puddles in the environs of Nadiad town and two at Vasad on the Mahi river. Both places are in the Kaira District of Gujarat State and about thirty to forty miles inland from the sea. The birds were all seen within the period of six weeks, so that had my watching extended over the entire winter, the number of sightings would, presumably, have been much greater.

S.K. Reeves,
Epsom, Surrey, U. K.

* * * *

A Sunbird's or Flowerpecker's nest

If any of your readers in the Bombay neighbourhood knows of a sunbird's or flowerpecker's nest (any species) presently in occupation -- with either eggs or chicks -- will he please communicate with the undersigned immediately? It is wanted for a life history study being undertaken by a post graduate student of field ornithology.

Salim Ali

APPEAL FOR BIRD NOTES

Work has started on the long-projected HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS under the joint authorship of Dr. Salim Ali and Prof. Dillon Ripley. The manual is planned to be completed in five volumes at intervals of about a year each. It will attempt to bring the Bird volumes of the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA series (2nd.ed.) up to date for the taxonomist and museum worker, and also to provide the field naturalist with a fully illustrated guide to the complete avifauna of the Indian sub-continent. By bringing together all that is known about Indian birds in life it will serve to emphasize how little in fact we do know, and thus enable field workers to try and fill the gaps. The first volume is expected to be ready for the press in about fifteen months from now. It will cover the first 450-500 species and subspecies of Ripley's A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN etc. The undersigned will be grateful for field notes by birdwatchers under any of the following heads: Distribution (additional to what is already published in the Fauna and other standard works); Habitat (biotopes); Food and Feeding Habits; Voice and Calls; Migration; Breeding (including courtship, period of incubation, share of the sexes in incubation and nest-feeding); Economics (if the bird or any of its parts or products are, or formerly were, used for particular purposes); Conservation. Any other observations relating to ecology or behaviour will be welcome. Though the immediate request is for notes pertaining to the birds to be covered by Vol. I, those for the subsequent volumes will also be appreciated.

Salim Ali

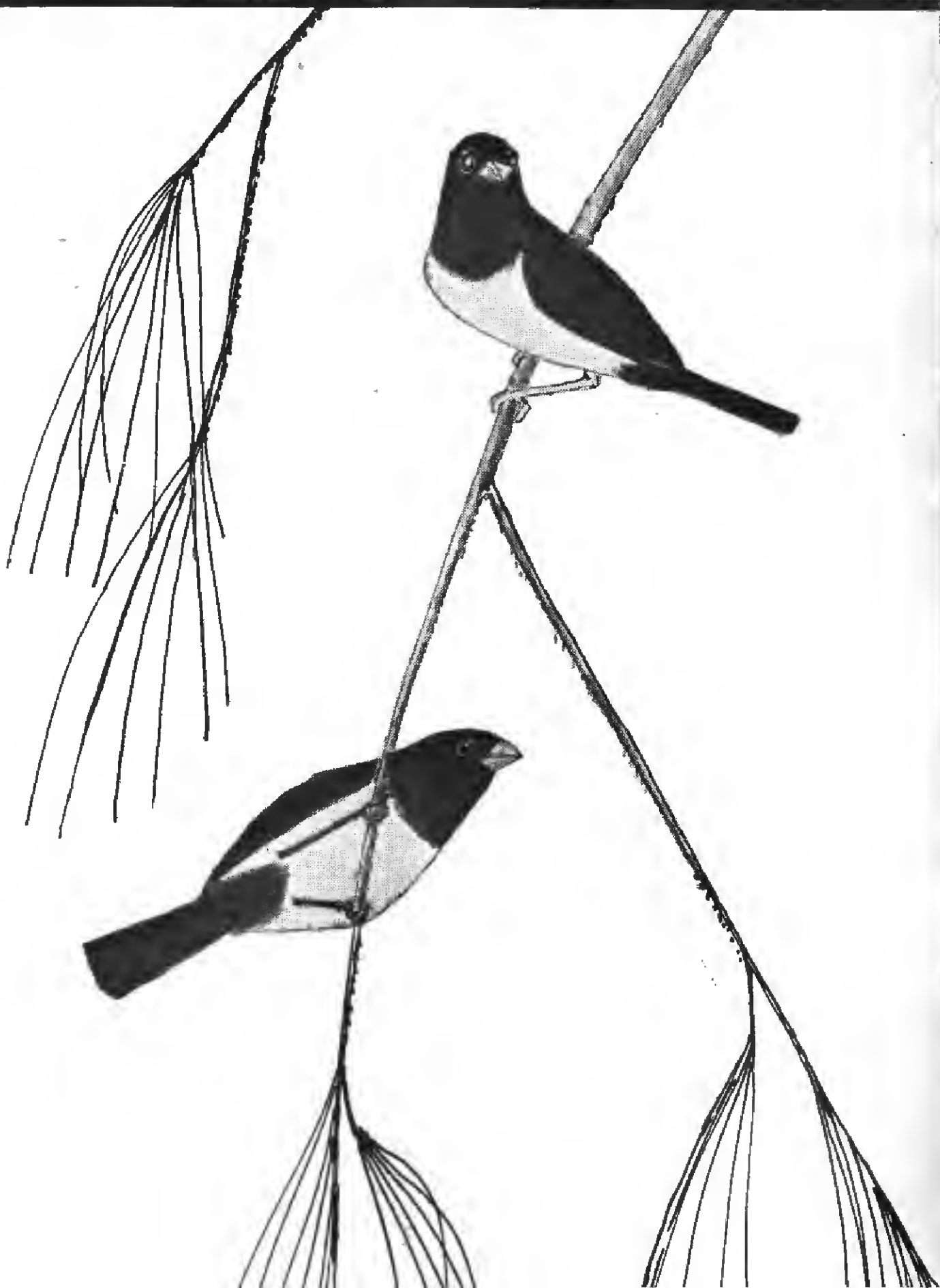
33 Pali Hill, Bandra,
Bombay 50

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
30A, Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 3-1963 December



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RECOVERY OF RINGED BIRDS

Reports of four more migrants ringed in India under the BNHS/WHO Bird Migration Field Study Project, and recovered in the USSR have been received since publishing the last in Newsletter for September 1963. The particulars of these four birds are:

Date Ringed	Ring No. and species	Place ringed	Manner & date of recovery	Place of recovery and remarks
26.9.1959	A-992 <u>Emberiza melanocephala</u> (Blackheaded Bunting)	Changalra, Bhuj, Kutch (c. 23° 18' N., 69° 43' E.)	Found dead, 26.5.1961	Temizkhebskaya, Kavkazskaya Dist., Krasnodar (c. 45° 30' N., 40° 45' E.) (c. 3730 km. NW. of Kutch).
16.3.1961	A-4777 <u>Motacilla alba</u> (White Wagtail)	Asambia, Kutch, (c. 22° 51' N., 69° 32' E.)	Found sick or wounded and perished, 11.7.1961	Zimnyatsky Dist., Volgograd Region (=Stalingrad) c. 38 km. SSW. of Mikhailovka, c. 49° 35' N., 43° 07' E. (c. 3660 km. NW. of Kutch)
19.12.1962	A-19082 <u>Motacilla flava thunbergi</u> (Greyheaded Yellow Wagtail)	Edanad, Chengannur, Kerala, c. 9° 20' N., 76° 38' E.	Shot by man, 8.9.1963	14 km. south of Kara-Balty, Kirghiz SSR (c. 42° 50' N., 73° 50' E.) c. 3700 km. north of Edanad
4.4.1962	C-382 <u>Anas querquedula</u> (Garganey or Bluewinged Teal)	Bharatpur, Rajasthan, c. 27° 13' N., 77° 32' E.	Shot by man, 15/18.8.1962	Chernobyl Dist., Kiev Region (c. 51° 19' N., 30° 14' E.) c. 4760 km. NW. of Bharatpur

The reference to Flowerpecker nests in the November issue of the Newsletter reminded me of a curious feature of the half-a-dozen Flowerpecker nests seen by me in the course of two decades of birdwatching. All these nests belonged to the Tickell's Flowerpecker (Dicaeum erythrorhynchos).

Every one of these nests was very close to an occupied nest of the vicious red tree-ant (which makes a conspicuous rough globe of leaves with some material very like spider-web). Four of the six nests were in mango trees and the others in a citrus. As my diaries are not with me now, I am unable to give precise details; but the fact of the proximity of the ants' nests and those of the bird is indelibly recorded in my memory by the few attempts I made to examine the nests and their contents in situ!

Two of the nests in mango trees were at a height of 20-25 feet. Two were found, one at a time, in the same citrus tree which stood very near a kitchen. In every case the ants' nest was just a foot or so away from the bird's.

Why is it that one seldom comes across a Flowerpecker's nest? Though the nest is small and more or less camouflaged, the feverish activity of the owners and their habit of advertising their presence always with the chit-chit-chit notes make it easy to discover the nest. The bird which brings food to the nest calls for a time both before and after delivering it. Moreover, if my memory serves rightly, the brooding bird keeps up a distinct and extremely monotonous sort of call, so that, in one or two days at least, the birdwatcher is forced to take note of it.

The last nest I saw could not even be approached to a distance of ten feet because of the ants; yet the nestlings fell a prey to a Tree Pie. So the presence of the ants, in one instance at least, failed to protect the bird's nest.

May I request readers who have come across nests of the Tickell's Flowerpecker to refer to their notes and let me know -- through the Newsletter -- whether they have clear evidence of the presence or absence of red ant nests near the Flowerpecker nests seen by them?

K.K. Neelakantan

MORE UNCOMMON BIRDS IN AND AROUND DELHI

Last year, I wrote about some uncommon bird visitors in my garden. Since then I have seen some more uncommon birds in and around Delhi. All of them are listed as 'very uncommon' in the Delhi Check-list, and two are new records for Delhi.

In December 1962, I saw a solitary female Large Cuckoo-Shrike in a babool tree near the dumping grounds in North Delhi. I was attracted by its harsh shrike-like call. A close look was enough to identify the bird, as it looks much like the Blackheaded Shrike which I had seen before. The Large Cuckoo-Shrike, about 11 inches in length, is a darkish grey bird, with a dark line through the eyes, dark wings edged with grey, and the underside is narrowly barred grey and white in the female. Its hooked bill and general form reminded me of a Tree Pie without the long tail.

On April 21, 1963, I saw two great Blackheaded Gulls on the Jumna in North Delhi. Both were immature birds. Although I had seen these birds twice before this was my first close view of these magnificent gulls. They were bigger than a kite. The wings were soft grey-brown, with the primaries black, and some black patches just behind the primaries. The underside of the wings was whitish except for the black primaries. The tail was white with a broad, black terminal band. The head was white except the crown which was mottled and streaked with brown. The massive yellow bill had a black-banded orange tip. The legs were yellow with a greenish tinge. One was quartering the river with slow, heavy wing beats, while the other was resting in shallow water in company with 5 Brownheaded Gulls in full breeding plumage. These latter birds were dwarfed by the former's enormous size. A little later I saw this bird

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shallower water. It started picking the fish with its heavy hooked bill. By this time 5-6 crows landed in the water nearby. Some of them started flying over the gull's head but no attempt was made to steal the fish. Annoyed by the crows, the gull, now and then stopped picking the fish, threw back its head, opened its bill wide and snapped occasionally. The crows were not intimidated and edged nearer; one seemed to stand right in front of the gull which flew away leaving the fish in the water. The crows did not try to retrieve the fish, but soon left the scene. When I looked back at the spot some twenty minutes later, the gull was back to its fish, this time without attention from the crows.

From the riverside that day I went to Okhla and saw two Greyheaded Mynas feeding near a drain. There were both Common and Bank Mynas feeding nearby, which afforded good comparison. The Greyheaded Myna is slightly smaller and slimmer than the two former birds. It is sandy grey above, with large pointed feathers on the head and neck. The underside is rufous and the dark tail has deep chestnut on much of the outer tail feathers. This myna has been seen only once before on the ridge in Old Delhi in September. The two birds at Okhla could not have been far from their breeding grounds in late April. Could anyone enlighten me as to where these Greyheaded mynas breed nearest to Delhi?

On April 28, on my second visit to the Jumna in North Delhi 10 Curlew Sandpipers were seen on a tiny mud island. Most of them were in their chestnut breeding plumage. These birds were recorded for the first time in Delhi five years ago at Najafgarh. The Curlew Sandpiper breeds in the extreme northern part of Asia about 80°E. longitude. In non-breeding plumage this bird can be easily confused with the Dunlin, from which it can be distinguished by the white rump. I saw one in eclipse plumage, which was caught in a mist net during the BNHS/WHO camp held at Bharatpur in September 1963.

On October 14, 1963 I saw a Kashmir Roller on an electric pole on the road to Najafgarh. Ever since Dr. Salim Ali had shown me one at Bharatpur two years ago, I felt that this bird perhaps occasionally passed through Delhi on its autumn migration. In June, while in Kashmir I had watched this Roller carefully. This bird, with its pale blue head and underside, could be easily distinguished from the Indian Roller which happened to be sitting on a near-by post. In flight too I saw the different wing and tail pattern --- black-tipped, blue wings and brown-centred, blue tail without the dark band. This bird's occurrence is a new record for Delhi.

On October 18, my daughter-in-law drew my attention to a male Orangeheaded Ground Thrush which was sitting on a low wall under a bush next to a small pool in my garden. As I turned round it flew off to my neighbour's compound. We had a very good look at it over the wall, but it soon left the area. This brilliantly coloured Ground Thrush breeds in the foothills. When Mr. Horace Alexander (who is here these days) saw the spot where I had seen this bird, he remarked that the only other Orangeheaded Ground Thrush which was seen in a New Delhi garden a decade ago also came to a tap to drink (my small shallow pool serves as a drinking place for many birds).

On November 7, 1963, while I was out birdwatching with Mr. Horace Alexander opposite Humayun's Tomb, he noticed a very dark bird in company with three Little Egrets in a very shallow pool. On closer inspection he identified it as the Indian Reef Heron. It was dark ashy grey all over, with the wings slightly darker. It was almost of the same size as the Little Egret, but with a slightly broader bill. It had a white chin. It seemed to be much more active in looking for food in the shallow water than the Little Egrets. This was presumably a young bird as it lacked the two crest feathers. Four days later, when I took three students out for birdwatching to the same place the bird rose from the same pool and flew in a westerly direction. As it flew overhead, it suddenly straightened its bent neck to the full and then the white chin and neck showed up distinctly against the dark neck. It resumed the bent position of the neck again. The Indian Reef Heron is exclusively a bird of the western sea-coasts of India. How on earth did it get so far inland? I should be most interested to know if it has been reported from any other inland area in India.

Mrs. Usha Ganguli

GLIDERS AND BIRDS

It is well known that in hot countries glider pilots often find themselves in the company of soaring eagles and vultures. In the opinion of a pilot with whom I discussed this subject recently, birds and pilots watch each other while trying to locate upcurrents. This is what he said: 'Glider pilots often locate upcurrents by observing birds circling in them. A large number circling at one place is a sure sign of an upcurrent. When the glider circles in the same current: the birds trail the glider.'

'Birds also locate upcurrents by observing others circling, so much so, if a glider circles at one place, even if there is no upcurrent, the birds often follow in the wake. They leave the vicinity only when they realize that they have been misled.'

Joseph George

Central Building Research Institute,
Roorkee, U.P.

BIRDWATCHING DURING 1963.

As this year draws to a close I would like to make an assessment of what I saw and learnt during 1963. Unfortunately, in spite of my resolution to keep careful notes, a glance at my diary reveals that the records are very inadequate. Also I have not followed them up by looking up references. The follow through process is absolutely necessary if one's stock of knowledge has to increase commensurate with the effort involved in watching. The following notes are based on the factual records in my diary, and I have added to them to the extent I thought necessary for making them intelligible.

On 29th December 1962 I was at Kihim. Some of you will remember my note on the birds of Kihim in Newsletter for December 1961, pp. 3-5, and recall what a variety of bird sights and sounds this place has to offer. Salim Ali and Lavkumar were also present so that identification of any species was no problem. Lavkumar pointed to a bird which I would not have noticed among all the sandpipers and plovers on the beach. It was a Terek Sandpiper (Tringa terek), also called the Avocet Sandpiper because of its upturned bill. The bird has orange-red legs and once your attention is drawn to this fact you cannot overlook it. A little later while walking along the beach we saw a Reef Heron (Egretta gularis) in its blue phase sitting on a casuarina. It had grass-green legs. Almost at the same time we saw one bird on the rocks which was the same species in its white phase. This bird had grass-green feet. Late in the evening we heard the Brown Wood Owl. It has a powerful hoot, and one of its calls is a far carrying choo oo oo ha ha a. I questioned Dr. Salim Ali about the food of the bird. He said that since it had feathers on its legs it probably did not catch fish, but lived only on mice, frogs, and insects -- apparently birds with feathered stockings do not relish wetting them. This bird is common in Gujarat and the breeding season is from February to March. The next morning we saw a female Rosefinch in the stubble fields behind the beach. It had a horn coloured conical bill and the body colour was olive-brown above. There was hardly any trace of red in the plumage, and the bird looked more or less like a female house sparrow. In my diary I had remarked: 'Kihim has been uncomfortably cool this time. The breeze gets into one's bones, and birds get up very late.'

Salim Ali saw an Isabeline Shrike (Lanius collurio isabellinus). According to Ripley it is a winter visitor coming as far south as Greater Bombay, so it was quite in order for the bird to be in Kihim at this time. Salim Ali remarked on the paucity of birds in Kihim at the time. His explanation was that the late rains resulted in the grain lying on the ground sprouting into green plants, and thus depriving the birds of their normal food in the form of seeds. The situation in the village pond however was quite en-

couraging, and I liked to believe that this was due to a notice I had hammered on a post in the tank reading: BOMBAY WILD ANIMALS AND WILD BIRDS PROTECTION ACT 1951 - KILLING OF BIRDS PROHIBITED - PENALTY: Fine Rs500/- Jail Six Months. There were Dabchicks (Podiceps ruficollis), Common Indian Moor-hens (Porphyrio porphyrio), Pheasant-tailed Jacanas (Hydrophasianus chirurgus), Bronzewinged Jacanas (Metopidius indicus), Common Pochard (chocolate head and neck), Cotton Teal (Nettapus coromandelianus) /the smallest of our wild duck, white predominating in the plumage/, Common Teal (Anas crecca) (pencilled greyish), and Whistling Teal (Dendrocygna javanica).

On 21 January 1963, I recorded having seen the Rosy Pastors for the first time this season on a bombax tree outside my garden at Andheri, Bombay. The next day we saw quite a few of these birds on the Bombay-Poona road under a banyan tree feeding on the ground with mynas. At the same place on a karvan-da-clad hill-side I saw a bird scuttling through the bushes, and I am practically certain that it was the Pied Crested Cuckoo. It had no business however to be at this place at this time of the year, when all its other companions had left for their wintering grounds.

On 29th January 1963, I was at Ranchi. A trip to the Hundru Falls did not produce anything exciting, and I did not have enough time to sit quietly and watch the birds go past you. The environs of Ranchi contain delightful stretches of forest but they are fast disappearing and being replaced by 'heavy engineering complexes' one of which was opened by the Prime Minister on the 16th of last month. The long line of sagwan trees are a refreshing sight for a visitor from Bombay where the trees are not as stately and shapely. I hope some of these forest tracts will be able to resist the advance of industrialization. The only birds which made an impact on my mind at Ranchi were the Pied Mynas. They are easily the most voluble of the myna tribe.

On 3rd February 1963, we were at Kharakvasla as the guests of Col. Baljit Singh. Under his firm and imaginative supervision the NDA estate has become a fine bird sanctuary, and I will refer to this a little later.

On 17 February 1963 a young kite from the palmyra tree next to our garden was being looked after carefully by both parents -- I watched this nest for many days. The picture which has remained fresh in my mind is the way the young bird walked backwards in the nest until it was dangerously over the edge before defecating to ensure that the nest was not fouled.

On 19 February 1963, I heard Magpie Robins singing at length, but the song was not too pleasant.

On 3 March 1963, a young male Paradise Flycatcher and a Large Cuckoo-Shrike were seen in our garden. This is the first time that I saw a Cuckoo-Shrike in our garden. My attention was drawn to it by its loud call, a double note -- ti-tee. It is a bird with a playful temperament and was chased by drongos quite frequently. There did not seem to be any point to this exercise except to find out who could accelerate faster while weaving in and out of the branches of the gulmohr tree.

23 March 1963: 3 pairs of Purplerumped Sunbirds on the Peltoforum tree calling excitedly fluttering their wings, with tails fanned out. They were obviously courting. It was not possible to make out if the mates had already been selected, and this communal courtship was only meant to stimulate them more than an individual affair, or whether there was general competition for the selection of mates.

28 April 1963: Drongos have started to build on the Shivan tree, Gmelina arborea. For the last two years birds have built on practically the same spot of the tree. The nest site is in a crotch completely exposed to the sky. At the far end of the tree in the leafiest portion Redvented Bulbuls have started to build. Last year too they built in the same place and throughout the

season they got protection from the attack of crows by the drongos. Whenever a crow came within 10 feet of the bulbul's nest, a drongo shot out from the blue and chased the attacker away. Last year the drongos as well as the bulbuls bred successfully. This year for some reason the drongos abandoned the nest, and the bulbuls also went elsewhere, for without the 'air umbrella' provided by the drongos there was no chance of their being able to protect their nest or the young.

15 May 1963: Great excitement as Dyal's nest with four chicks discovered under Mangalore tile of roof (see Newsletter 3(6):7-8, June 1963).

22 May 1963: Two Pied Crested Cuckoos arrived in our garden, looking very tired and listless, and not calling at all.

11 June 1963: Whitebreasted Waterhens making a lot of noise. Subsequently they nested in our garden and were seen wandering around with their chicks.

First week July 1963: Went to Kharakvasla. Col. Baljit Singh had put up hides for photography at various places of the N.D.A. estate. Several nests were kept under close observation by his men. A Yellow-wattled Lapwing had entered into the spirit of the game very well. As our jeep came near the nest the bird quietly walked away and stood at a distance of 50 yards quite unperturbed, knowing fully well from past experience that no harm could come to the nest. As we got into the jeep the bird started to walk back and while we were only a hundred yards away it had returned to the nest.

19 September 1963: Left for Jasdan, and stayed at Hingolghadh with Y.S. Shiv-rajkumar. Saw many delightful birds. Participated in the ringing of the BNHS/WHO scheme. Was quite thrilling to recapture birds ringed a year or two ago. Among the recaptures was one Sylvia hortensis ringed in the same place in 1960, and two S. hortensis and Upupa epops ringed in 1962. A Phylloscopus occipitalis netted and ringed this time is a new record for Saurashtra. Had the great good fortune to see three Great Indian Bustards about 12 miles from Hingolghadh.

23 September 1963: Returned from Jasdan to find that the flock of Common Green Bee-eaters (Merops orientalis) which had left the neighbourhood in May, as they do every year, were back in station.

8 October 1963: A young male Paradise Flycatcher (Tchitrea paradisea) seen in our garden.

In middle October I went to Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Jamshedpur. It was cheering to see the notice in the Hazaribagh National Park reading: A BIRD IN THE BUSH IS WORTH TWO IN THE HAND.

Zafar Futehally

REVIEWS

1. PRELIMINARY FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN. By George E. Watson, Richard L. Zusi, and Robert W. Storer. Washington 1963. Smithsonian Institution.

This field guide has been prepared to stimulate interest in the birds of the northern half of the Indian Ocean and to facilitate gathering further data during the International Indian Ocean Expedition.

The birds which have so far been recorded in this region are listed, and brief notes which emphasize the lack of information on these birds are given. The 'fragmentary' data available on the birds of Laccadives are included, but coastal India, Burma, and Malaya, Ceylon, Sumatra and the Andaman and Nicobar islands are omitted. The Common Myna of India

appears as an introduced species in most of the tropical islands of the region. It would be interesting to know what the residents of these islands think of this bird.

Amsterdam Island, a volcanic rock 22 square miles in area, 3000 miles south of Ceylon and over 1000 miles from the nearest island to the north, has among its bird population, non-breeding migrants such as the Greenshank and the Common Sandpiper. These birds must have extraordinary powers of navigation to fly to this island which is but a speck in the vast ocean.

A very useful section of the book is devoted to the collection and preparation of specimens. Black and white drawings of the birds in different stages of plumage, drawing attention to easily recognizable features, should help in identifying them in the field or at sea.

(J.G.)

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2. NATURAL HISTORY DRAWINGS IN THE INDIA OFFICE LIBRARY. By Mildred Archer. pp. ix+116 (25 x 19 cm.). With 26 plates. London 1962. Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Price 27s 6d net.

If you were a dinner guest of a British gentleman residing in India in the 18th or 19th Century you would of course be spared the customary show of your host's animal slides; you could easily find yourself committed to looking through an album of animal and plant paintings executed by your host's private artist. (An artist cost about 100 rupees a year -- much less than most people spend on photography.) Indeed in those unsettled times, when miniature painters could no longer rely on the patronage of local courts, many artists were glad to work for eccentric Englishmen who insisted on accurate biological details in their paintings but refused to allow them to illuminate them with a rich border ~~and~~ worked in gold leaf.

Indian artists were quite prepared to make adjustments and adapt their style and methods.... They looked carefully at the English illustrated books which were shown to them as models and did their utmost to imitate their general character..... At the same time it was difficult for Indian artists entirely to change old habits. Unless they were very carefully supervised some did not always pay close attention to detail and might alter form to suit their feeling for design..... Considering the great difference in the habits of the artist who was trained to produce something decorative, and the aim of the master who demanded a scientifically accurate reproduction, the degree of success achieved was quite remarkable. All the 26 plates in this book show a remarkable synthesis between beauty and accuracy. The Indian artist could be a very good camera.

This was the period when the passion for natural history was at its height in England, and the wonders which excited the Englishman in Asia were not the wonders of people, customs, and clothes, but of strange plants and animals. It was at this time that the great gardens of England were stocked with exotic plants -- azaleas, peonies, wistarias, rhododendrons. And the native artist was indispensable in recording and documenting all the newly discovered species.

Of the drawings and paintings which were commissioned in this way, many have found their way into the India Office Library.

(L.F.)

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Toxic Chemicals and bird life

This unhappy subject is always on the agenda of international meetings of the International Council for Bird Preservation. Despite the efforts of international bodies the use of toxic chemicals has increase every year since 1954, when the first warnings against its use were issued. A resolution adopted by the British Section of ICBP at their meeting in 1963 urged the Government to require that the products which are poisonous to man or wild life be plainly labelled 'POISON'. There is increasing evidence of fatal effects of such-lethal doses of toxic chemicals on predatory birds, especially on fish eating birds.

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International Wildfowl Research Bureau

The Executive Board of the IWRB met in June 1963. A resolution drew attention to the danger to wildfowl from prolonged winters of the type which occurred in 1962/63. It noted that in those countries where hunting was closed wildfowl benefitted greatly and others were requested to follow suit. The Conference also recommended that the SHELDUCK be protected in all countries for a period of five years.

CORRESPONDENCE

Reproducing of papers already published

May I suggest that you print (or reprint, of course) the articles that were once published by Hugh Whistler, 'The Study of Indian Birds' (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 23, etc.)? To many members of the Field Club these articles may be unfamiliar, interesting, and extremely useful.

Dr Sâlim Ali's request for information on our birds has caught me on the wrong foot. On my transfer to Ernakulam I was forced to send 38 volumes of my bird-journal to my permanent home. The same circumstance may prevent me in future from helping you with matter for the Newsletter -- unless, of course, I see something interesting here.

I have on hand something like Mrs. Jamal Ara's observations on a male Baya -- a series of timed observations of nesting Goldenback Woodpeckers. But that sort of thing does not normally attract the reader.

Why not try to get a series of articles on the existing bird sanctuaries in India? The Wild Life Board should be able to provide the material. If you can get me the matter, I dont mind trying to put it into some sort of shape.

K.K. Neelakantan.

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A letter from Ceylon

Since I took over the secretaryship of the Ceylon Bird Club for a few months I have just begun to see your publication. May I congratulate you on it; it is easily the best magazine of its kind I have come across.

May I make one or two comments on the last two numbers.

1. Purplerumped Sunbirds: In Ceylon this bird breeds mainly in the first half of the year, but a few nests have been found right through the year. I give figures of the number of records of nests that I have -- they are culled from the notes of W.W.A. Phillips and the Ceylon Bird

Club as well as my own observations: Jan. 5; Feb. 15; Mar. 27; Apr. 28; May 24; June 11; July 8; Aug. 3; Sept. 2; Oct. 4; Nov. 1; Dec. 3. The monsoon begins here in May and from June until mid or late September high south-west winds prevail over the north-east, dry, part of the country, while the south-west is also wet. The pair of birds in my garden on the south-east coast built in June last year, and August this year; in both cases the nest was destroyed, this year before the eggs were laid, and in both cases the destruction was probably accomplished by wind and rain.

2. Pittas and Crows: For some years my father lived between the main road and the sea coast -- a distance of some 200 yards -- in Colombo. The main birds were Crows, Sparrows, Magpie Robins, and a pair of Tailor Birds. But each year during November a Pitta would appear on one or two mornings. Often it was harried by a company of crows and appeared exhausted. Once I picked up a dead bird, but though it had been killed by crows it showed no signs of having been eaten.

3. Glossy Ibises used to be present in moderate numbers in Ceylon, but the first record of one this century was at Kalametiya on the south-east coast in November 1952 where two were seen by Mr. C. E. Norris. I saw one in the same place on September 11th and again on September 16th this year. In both cases it was in the company of a large concourse of wading birds of all sizes from stints to Painted Storks and including upwards of 100 White Ibises. When the water in the lagoon rose most of the larger wading birds disappeared and the Glossy Ibis has not been seen again.

Rev. G.C. Jackson
The Mission House, Tangalla, Ceylon
November 14, 1963

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Pittas and Crows

November issue of the Newsletter is very interesting. The note about Pittas interested me most.

In my experience I have collected dead Pittas in Dadar, Bombay, three times in 1954 and 1956. In August 1954 and July 1955 dead Pittas were collected at the Veterinary College and Haffkine Institute at Parel Bombay by the respective staff.

From Shri K.K. Neelakantan's note I now feel that these Pittas also must be victims of crows.

P.W. Soman
Bombay Natural History Society

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The 1st Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club
to be held on Saturday, 14 December 1963 at the rooms of the
Bombay Natural History Society at 91 Walkeshwar Road, Bombay 6
- some suggestions received from readers.

As an item for the future activity of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India, I submit the following suggestion for consideration at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting:

The Club should take suitable steps to install at least one nestbox (artificial nesting site) on each school campus in India.

This should help in making school children aware of birds. The artificial nesting site will be a spot they can often look to. It can be a regular nestbox or an empty tin (in a shady place) or even an earthen pot. (There is an element of risk in using the last.)

I wish the meeting and the Club all success.

Joseph George
Central Building Research Inst.,
Koorkee, U.P.

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I am a member of the Club (Membership No. 237), and am regularly getting your Newsletter from January 1963. I have also received the Constitution (Draft) of the Club in your October issue and intimation of the meeting in the November issue. I want to put some of the suggestions listed below for the consideration of the General body which please put on the Agenda items and oblige.

Item - 1. Whether it is possible for the Club to conduct the Bird Study Camps for a week or for a fortnight for the members of the Club. If so, the General body may consider to participate in this type of activity.

Item - 2. The Club will allow its members as a special case and may nominate to permit on behalf of the Club, to take part in the Bird Ringing Camps, i.e. Hingolghat and Bombay.

Item - 3. The Club should issue a member badge or certificate to its members with or without fees.

Kindly do the needful and let me know accordingly as it is not possible for me to attend the meeting

Harshavadan G. Gor,
Ahmedabad, Gujarat State

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I have the following points to make regarding the Newsletter and the Club:

Club: Regarding the draft constitution, it seems to me to be asking too much of the Secretary to undertake the duties of Secretary, Editor of the Newsletter, and Treasurer. I am quite sure that as the activities of the Club grow this will prove far too much for one person. Each of these three responsibilities are distinct and separate and should be undertaken by three different individuals.

Newsletter

1. The Newsletter should be stapled on the centre line, i.e. in the fold instead of through the side as at present. This should improve page trimming and neatness.

2. The Club should now select a bird as its symbol, the name of which should be the name of the Newsletter. We should get an artist to produce a nice attractive drawing of the bird which should then always appear on our stationery, the cover of the Newsletter, etc. Examples are The Ibis, The Auk, Pavo, etc. The Hornbill adopted by our own Bombay Natural History Society, the Gannet by the British Trust for Ornithology, the Grouse by British Birds magazines etc. In this connection may I suggest the Sarus as a large, elegant bird which is so well known and is so characteristically Indian. Moreover, the name is short and snappy, yet uncommon, and the bird itself gives the artist plenty of scope and would make a really handsome emblem. The title of the Newsletter could then be: SARUS - 'Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India.

3. Some simple rules for the guidance of contributors should be issued such as those printed inside the cover of the BNHS Journal. This will lighten the task of the Editor. I certainly think we should insist that contributors give the scientific name of the bird of which they are writing in brackets after the first time that its English name is mentioned.

We should use the nomenclature of Ripley's SYNOPSIS.

4. I think we should work towards raising the status of the Newsletter to that of a journal.

In conclusion, may I take the opportunity of expressing the hope that you will have a very successful first A.G.M. of the Club. How I wish I could be there. However, you have my sincerest good wishes for the Club's prosperity.

S.K. Reeves
Epsom, Surrey, England.

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
32-A Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 50